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JULY 18-21, 1991
UNIVERSITY HIGH, MELBOURNE
END OF THE ERA: Labor's decade of domination is fading. ALR assembled a roundtable discussion to assess its legacy.

THE GLOSS WEARS OFF: Women's magazines have hit hard times. Jennifer Craig looks at why.

FOLLOW THE LEADER: The Labor leadership struggle dominated the news pages. But, argues David Burchell, it was widely misunderstood.

THE RIGHT STUMBLES: The NSW elections in May were a major setback for the Coalition. ALR's team of analysts looks behind the headlines.

AFTER POLITICS?: It's not just politicians; politics itself in disrepute. Peter Beilharz mounts the case for the defence.

TECHNOFEAR: Tech noir: video's new art form

BEADS AND TRINKETS: Documentary and the Left: an old liaison renewed

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS: Soap's fair cops

PROMISE UNFULFILLED: What to make of EEO's record

LOCAL CULTURES: Four studies of local cultural development. Gay Hawkins and Kathie Gibson on culture in the city; Colin Mercer on Brisbane's cultural policy; Julie Revallion on cultural edifice-building and Marla Guppy on new suburbs.
Our critique of Soviet society became wide-ranging. But it was mainly a criticism of the nature of the political system. We were aware of some of its grave economic problems but still felt that the basis of the economy was sound, and that once political barriers were removed, solutions to economic problems would somehow naturally follow.

It was not until 1989—when the power of the people in Eastern Europe and the progress (even if erratic) of glasnost in the Soviet Union revealed the depth and extent of the economic crisis of these countries and the degree of corruption and environmental degradation it had been responsible for—that it was fully brought home that there were yet more fundamental problems than we had ever realised in the socialist project.

In no way would I wish to mitigate the dreadful legacy of stalinism or its responsibility, mainly through the agencies of communist parties, for grave losses of credibility and even legitimacy on the Left side of politics. But it would be no service to the Left cause, however defined, to ignore fundamental problems which are not resolved by the demise of the stalinist model.

This new climate of uncertainty has put the Left as a whole on the defensive in the economic field—a field which was once regarded by both sides of politics as a Left stronghold—and has thus also placed the Left on the defensive more broadly. The Left has become reactive rather than pro-active, as a number of recent articles in ALR have pointed out. The failures of all the economies claiming to be socialist have made it virtually politically impossible to advocate that either 'state' or 'workers' should take over the means of production as full-blown solutions to the patent evils of capitalist control and power.

In addition, political parties—which the Left, in the main, has elevated even further than the conservative side of politics, as a locus of political wisdom—are suffering from a possibly irreversible, and probably deserved, cynicism. There is a consequent reluctance to give 'the party' anywhere near the kind of dedication which people of my generation—and even later ones—were prepared to give.

Put in a nutshell, the vision of a viable social system which can be advanced as an alternative to modern capitalism is in disarray, and the means by which radical change may be brought about cannot any longer be based on old models.

This may be the cause of even greater chagrin in that the depth and extent of the problems and dangers which today confront humanity are growing rather than diminishing. And it is also faced with new crises—indeed has created them—such as the environmental one.

Political movements across the whole spectrum have been affected by the changes. But it is the Left which faces the greatest challenge. All sections of the Left have to work in a new situation in which the old signposts have fallen over as though through dry rot, or been engulfed or displaced by political earthquakes, so that if they do point at all, it may be in the wrong direction.

Many people are used to expecting that 'their' publications will reinforce the things they already know or believe. ALR does not, in the main, play such a role, nor should it try to do so. It should, rather, do what it has been doing, and try to do it better still. That is, to be an avenue and forum in which ideas and problems can be discussed and developed, rather than pursuing a predetermined 'line'. For the days when the Left could promise the millenium when all problems would be solved, and joy could at last begin, are gone forever.

ERIC AARONS was in 1966, and is in 1991, a member of ALR's editorial collective.
sequences of deregulation. They are, regrettably, now apparent to all.

The newly liberated financial sector returned Keating the compliment by playing a key role in the squandering of investable capital garnered from overseas borrowing and local profit windfalls. Little of the capital flowed as it was intended to, and as Keating then boasted it would, into the tradeable industries. All the while, his constituency, the ordinary folk, paid the price for this economic experiment with real wage cuts and now, ultimately, with their jobs.

Cynics might interpret Keating’s retreat to the backbenches as a crafty career move. With unemployment tipped to touch the million mark and the current account deficit still as stubborn as ever, who would want to be treasurer? The April trade figures showed a daily import consumption rate of $180 million, the same as that prevalent through the booming economy of 1988. Having a recession-laden economy with a current account deficit pitched at 4.5% of GDP almost defies explanation. Had Keating still been in office, he would have had to announce with more hand-wringing the arrival of double-digit unemployment to his pals in the press gallery.

It is unfortunate for Keating that while no longer Treasurer, he cannot leave the blame behind. His great vulnerability was that he wore his inveterate optimism for the Australian economy’s ability to adapt on his Italian suit sleeves. J-curve aside, how many times has he been ribbed for his over-ubiquity in his ‘Bring home the bacon’ budget speech of 1988-89? Yet only a few weeks ago Keating was at it again. In his last days as Treasurer, he told parliament that the current account deficit and debt problems were basically licked. He went round the Canberra press gallery with graphic proofs of the ‘bucking bronco’ of terms of trade swings which had put the economy on a rollercoaster ride and made the job of economic management all the harder.

He does have a case. The Australian economy, for all Keating’s engineering, is still extremely vulnerable - some would say even more exposed than ever - to the vicissitudes of the world economy. Alas, Keating would be hard put explaining his difficulties with economic management to an impatient, sceptical public.

Now on the backbenches, Keating is not one to waste time. He will, I’m sure, channel his hyperactive mind into some wide reading. Perhaps he should dabble in some Keynes. In the light of our asset price driven investment boom of the eighties, he might like to consider what Keynes said of a similar occurrence in the 20s:

Speculators may do no harm as bubbles on a steady stream of enterprise. But the position is serious when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation. When the capital development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done.

Another book Keating may re-read is The Caged Lion, the second in William Manchester’s trilogy on the life of Winston Churchill. Keating was reportedly much taken by it when he first read it some time before the March 1990 election. Keating surely identified with Churchill’s banishment to the political wilderness and will, I’m sure, be itching for the third volume. The circumstances behind Churchill’s forced departure from No.10 Downing Street should make compulsive reading.

The story goes that Churchill was continually pestered to go by his dashing, dapper Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden. Churchill resisted until backroom pressure forced his exit, but then Eden lost his marbles over Nasser, and his job over the Suez crisis. His downfall was essentially the result of his self-righteous, inflated, vain demeanour, the product, no doubt, of being the pin-up boy of British politics, an accolade foisted upon him by an adoring Fleet Street press. The lessons are obvious for the Canberra press gallery’s own pin-up boy of Australian politics.

ALEX MILLMOW, a former Treasury officer, teaches in economics at Charles Sturt University-Riverina, Wagga Wagga.
The Sorrow Continues

What Ethiopia needed most following the departure of former President Mengistu Haile Mariam in May 1991 was a stable government, new directions in economic and political policies and a leadership that inspired new confidence in the country. Instead, it got Meles Zenawi, a guerrilla leader with no previous government experience and whose policies are unknown. Zenawi, head of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), is unacceptable to many Ethiopians outside Tigray province and, before long, he might resort to force, as Mengistu did, to govern.

Under Mengistu’s leadership, Ethiopia experienced enormous political and economic problems which included long-running civil wars, persistent droughts, incredible poverty, massive famine, economic mismanagement and severe environmental degradation. Most of these problems predated Mengistu’s leadership, for even before Mengistu, Ethiopia was economically backward, had an authoritarian and centralised political structure, its various nationalities felt oppressed, and the war in Eritrea had been going on since the 1960s.

For generations, Ethiopia, the oldest state in Africa, had been ruled by centralised and repressive governments which have been completely oblivious to popular demands. The imperial government, which had lasted more than 2,500 years when it was overthrown in 1974, had ruled provinces through dynasties appointed centrally. By the 1970s, most Ethiopians wanted change, but when it came it was ‘hijacked’ by the military. The Dergue (military junta), which toppled Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, also maintained central control over the regions and provinces.

The Dergue, of which Mengistu was an original member, initially cooperated closely with radical civilian intellectuals, who helped it espouse socialism and provided some policy guidance in the mid-70s. During this period, there were hopes that the then progressive government would find solutions to Ethiopia’s multifaceted problems. It turned out that the Dergue’s alliance with the leftist intellectuals in the mid-70s was a tactical ploy designed to rally opponents of the imperial regime. The Dergue was also anxious to demonstrate that its intervention was prompted by the uneven distribution of wealth and the existing archaic and unrepresentative political order, which it sought to change. Its socialist program was concerned with self-reliance, the dignity of labour and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity, hence the slogan Ethiopia Tikdem (Ethiopia First).

By 1976, Mengistu had emerged as one of the main forces behind the secretive Dergue and, in February 1977, he assumed absolute power following a bloody confrontation with, and the assassination of, the former head of state, General Teferi Benti. In the next 18 months, Mengistu turned against the radical civilian organisations, including the trotskyite Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON). The two organisations were banned and most of their leaders executed during the struggle of the Dergue-spearheaded ‘revolutionary red terror’ against what the Dergue termed ‘counter-revolutionary terror’ in 1977. In practice, Mengistu’s policies combined some elements of the Ethiopian imperial tradition and marxist-leninist principles. It might appear a contradiction in terms, but Mengistu ruled, lived and acted like a ‘Leninist Tsar’.

Mengistu also made a drastic shift in foreign policy in 1977. When President Carter terminated aid to Ethiopia in February 1977 because of its human rights record, Mengistu responded by ordering the immediate closure of the largely redundant American facilities in the country. The US had provided economic and military assistance to Ethiopia since the 1950s and had built a military communications base at Kagnew, near Asmara, in Eritrea. Possibly anticipating the break with the US, Mengistu had already approached the Soviet Union in December 1976 for military assistance. From mid-1977 to 1990, the Soviet Union gave Ethiopia more than US$14 billion worth of weapons. The Soviets and Cuban troops also played a crucial role in helping Ethiopia repulse a 1977 Somali invasion and stayed on after the war to buttress the Mengistu regime. The regime’s collapse in May 1991 was partly due to the fact that the Cuban troops and East German advisers had been withdrawn by the late 1980s and Moscow had cut military aid following the expiry of the Ethiopian-Soviet agreement in January 1991.

If the Soviets and Cubans had provided the external support for Mengistu, internally, he had relied on the military to govern. He had often used them to suppress nationalist demands for autonomy throughout the country and to execute his rivals. His support in the military appeared, however, to decline following the May 1989 coup attempt. By most accounts, the failure of that coup and the subsequent execution of plotters, destroyed one of the best chances of a coherent successor regime.

Always wary of popular leaders, Mengistu ensured he had eliminated all his rivals, both civilian and military, before he agreed to establish the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), the first ever political party in Ethiopia, which was launched in September 1984. The WPE, established as a means of political control rather than a channel for popular participation,
followed the standard procedures of a centralised Soviet-style communist party. Although theoretically the party operated on the principle of collective leadership, in practice, Mengistu’s word was law. Other political institutions like the Cabinet, the National Assembly and the civil service were subordinate to the party.

In the few years preceding his departure from the political scene, Mengistu had come under considerable pressure from Western powers, especially the United States, to show more respect for human rights and to liberalise the political system. In March 1990, he had announced a package of measures designed to encourage political pluralism, including the proposal to change the name of the ruling party from the WPE to the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party and to widen its membership to accommodate opposition groups but his critics dismissed them as a transparent attempt to buy more time.

The 1987 Constitution, which turned Ethiopia into a ‘People’s Democratic Republic’, still referred to a one-party state and the idea of turning the WPE into a wider, more pluralistic front merely succeeded in upsetting WPE members without satisfying the demands for democracy.

Mengistu also recommended a gradual switch from a centrally planned economy to a market one, but the bulk of his economic measures were greeted with cynicism, because Ethiopia had no proper investment codes to encourage foreign investment.

The main challenges to Mengistu since the 1970s came from the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Both movements achieved extensive military gains between 1989 and 1991, eventually forcing Mengistu to flee. Although the EPLF and the TPLF were united against Mengistu, their victory is likely to put them at odds with each other, because of their inherently conflicting goals.

The EPLF which broke away from the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1971, has always sought full independence for Eritrea, the former Italian colony that was federated with Ethiopia under UN auspices in 1952. Selassie unilaterally dissolved the federal arrangement in 1961 and reduced Eritrea to the status of a province. That move prompted the establishment of the Muslim-led ELF but, since the mid-70s, it is the EPLF which has been the most effective resistance group in Eritrea. The EPLF secretary-general, Isaas Afwerki, has indicated that the movement would like to organise a referendum to determine the views of the Eritrean people on the independence issue, but that is only a tactical ploy because the EPLF will not accept anything short of full independence. Following the departure of Mengistu, the EPLF established an ‘interim’ administration independent of Addis Ababa, pending a referendum. That step has left Ethiopia without its own port, because both Assab and Massawa on the Red Sea are within Eritrea, and Zenawi will find it hard to convince Ethiopians that their country can do without Eritrea. Thus, Zenawi’s first political test is whether he can safeguard Ethiopia’s territorial integrity by re-establishing control over Eritrea.

Zenawi’s TPLF was established in 1975 with the help of the EPLF, and is not, therefore, in a strong position to challenge the EPLF’s goal of achieving independence for Eritrea. It emerged on the wave of strong resentment in Tigray province against the Dergue’s land reform policies. The TPLF which, until recently has been effectivly controlled by the pro-Albanian Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, initially demanded autonomy for Tigray province, but because Tigray has been part of Ethiopia for more than 2,500 years, the TPLF could not credibly stake a claim for secession. Moreover, Tigray province is also inhabited by other ethnic groups, including some Afars and Oromos, and these could not accept the TPLF as their legitimate representative. Nor could the TPLF claim to speak for all Tigrayans, because the EPLF is also led by Tigrinya-speakers.

The TPLF, therefore, sought to modify its image and goals in the early 1980s. In 1981 it played a leading role in the formation of the Amhara-dominated Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM) and in 1989 merged with the EPDM to form the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This manoeuvre was a transparent effort by the TPLF to change its image of a purely provincial ethnic organisation and to gain some support from the Amhara and other ethnic groups. By 1991, the EPRDF included several other groups,
but there has never been any doubt that the TPLF, by virtue of its superior military force, has been the senior partner in the coalition and controlled the agenda of the EPRDF. It was not surprising, therefore, that when the PRDF captured Addis Ababa in May 1991, it was Zenawi, a TPLF leader, who emerged as Ethiopia’s interim president.

That the EPRDF could switch from its admiration of the Albanian model and accept US guidance within months when the opportunity for leadership was dangled before it, is not remarkable. What is important is how quickly it can start the healing and reconciliation process. It needs not only to eschew its previous goals and policies, but it is expected to accept ideas and implement policies it has never thought out itself. Although it always preached against Mengistu’s policies, the EPRDF will find it imperative to accept the Dergue’s land reform policies, especially as they were applied in the south.

The new leadership will also have to deal with the legacy of war. People at war for any extended period of time often find it difficult to adapt to peace-time normalcy, and there are many Ethiopians in this category. Most of these, including guerrilla forces and more than 300,000 undisciplined and armed Mengistu troops, might feel more comfortable with a Kalashnikov than a ploughshare. There are many other Ethiopians who have been uprooted or have lost the habit of working and know only how to fight. These people constitute a potentially destabilising force against any government in Addis Ababa.

Zenawi is expected to liberalise the Ethiopian political system, establish a multi-party system and hold elections within one year as a demonstration of his commitment to democracy. There is no doubt about the efficacy of a multi-party system in a society that understands and accepts the Eastern notions of democracy. But democracy has never been practised in Ethiopia and Zenawi himself has never experienced it. Zenawi will find it convenient to mime the language of democracy which is expected of him, but there is little evidence that at the moment he fully understands the meaning and has the ability to translate these words into action. Consequently, he might create political structures that give the appearance of democracy, but the reality might be something else.

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**After Keating**

As the World’s Greatest Treasurer and the World’s Greatest Parliamentarian metamorphoses into the World’s Most Obtrusive Backbencher, it is time to get a few things on the record before the hagiographers of the Labor Party succumb totally to post-Keating tristesse.

It is worth recalling, for instance, that the WGT accolade was bestowed upon Paul John Keating by Euromoney magazine, the bible of the hot money speculators, rather than by the kind of disinterested committee which awards Nobel prizes. (Next year the same magazine rated Keating the second worst finance minister among those surveyed, edging out only Egypt, but let that pass.) It is usually worth noting that the action of Keating that had the speculators licking their lips in the first place was the removal of most foreign investment controls, which exposed the soft underbelly of the Australian economy to their depredations.

At the time, the hot money boys were not alone in their lavish praise of the Great Deregulator. Most of the business world and almost all the economic and political commentators were showering Keating with praise for his actions in floating the dollar, allowing foreign banks into the country, freeing up the market, and so on. The few doubters were ignored in the orgy of congratulation of what was seen as Keating’s courageous decision to throw us into the same pool as the big boys.

And indeed it was courageous; some would say foolhardy. The Australian economy was not then, and still is not, in any shape to resist the kind of pressure the international financial community can exert if it sets its collective mind to it. Not only is our overall base fairly small by world standards; our heavy reliance on commodity exports makes it peculiarly vulnerable to the vagaries of all sorts of factors outside our control, including the weather.

Regulation is not, of course, a final defence against either acts of God or acts of the market, but it can be both a deterrent and a cushion. When Keating took his hands off the steering wheel in the early days of the government he was showing an almost Panglossian faith in a benign future. By definition, deregulation is fine when things are going well. The test comes when things start to go badly, as they did in the mid 80s. Nowadays, even those who were most gung ho about Keating’s free market ideas at the time (Max Walsh springs to mind) are cautiously acknowledging that there might be something to be said for some forms of regulation after all. Again, the pre-Keating regime would not necessarily have been able to avoid the present recession, although it would have been able to prevent the credit boom which led to the import boom which led to the balance of payments crisis when led to high interest rates which led to the economic downturn. But regulation would at least have given the government a few more levers to pull.
Despite a balance of payments crisis of mind-boggling proportions and the highest unemployment in 50 years, Keating leaves the Australian economy in better overall shape than he found it, and if the unintended consequences of many of his miscalculations—low inflation—can be made permanent, there will be numerous grounds for long-term optimism. But it can, and should, be argued that much of the underlying economic strength has a lot more to do with the work of John Button, John Dawkins and John Kerin in particular than with the Keating-Treasury model. Nor should the role of Ralph Willis, the now embittered Peter Walsh and Bob Hawke himself be understated. Keating was certainly the most flamboyant performer on the economic stage but, despite some of his more outrageous Pladdo Domingo-type remarks, he was far from the only one.

But Keating's fan club has seldom been too fussed about the rights and wrongs of his reputation as an economic whizz-kid—or at least a very fast learner. What really turned them on was Keating in Parliament. The importance of Parliament depends very much on where you stand—inside the colosseum or out of it. For political groupies, who include all the members of the House of Representatives, most of the Senators and all the press gallery, Parliament is where governments and their leaders are made and broken. The groupies will tell you that every successful prime minister achieved his position through his dominance on the floor of the chamber. The failures fell in the same arena.

This goes a long way to explaining why Keating commands such widespread adulation in the media because there is no doubt that Keating is the dominant parliamentarian of his time. There have been many who have been wittier, more plausible, more eloquent. It is unlikely that there has ever been one who attacked with greater ferocity. The torrents of insults Keating directs across the floor of the House simultaneously demolish his opponents and inspire his followers. Keating has made the Parliament theatre of cruelty his own.

The problem is that, while his performances are rapturously applauded by the people he likes to call the aficionados, outsiders—which means the voting public—find them arrogant, bumptious, crude and generally distasteful. This did not matter quite so much when all but the spectators in the public galleries were shielded from the full impact of Keating in his natural habitat. In print, or even on radio, the screams of abuse could be tolerated, if not altogether accepted. But in living colour on the evening television news, Keating is definitely not suitable for children nor, indeed, for most adults. Much of Keating's unpopularity stems from the perception that he is a foul-mouthed bully. The World's Greatest Parliamentarian may be honoured in his own Caucus room, but in the wider electorate he is seen as something to be disposed of with surgical gloves and tongs.

And yet, despite his record, despite his public manner, Keating retains a certain credibility. Clearly, he is not the only one who believes his own publicity about his own omniscience. Despite the obvious fact that almost all of Keating's economic predictions have been absurdly optimistic, and many have been just plain wrong, people still tend to think that Keating knows what he is about—that what happens is a result of deliberate policy. They also tend to believe Keating when he brags that he is the government's powerhouse, its dynamo, its brains and muscle.

As has already been noted, this is something of an exaggeration but, because Keating has marketed himself so aggressively, his wider audience is prepared to give him personally most of the credit and most of the blame for the state of the nation. At present, of course, it is almost all blame. Although mightily disillusioned with just about everyone even vaguely connected with mainstream politics, the voters are still prepared to admit grudgingly that perhaps it is not all Hawke's fault. It can't be, because it is all Keating's fault. Popularity is, of course, not everything. It may even be the last refuge of a political scoundrel. But Keating lacks even that last refuge.

His place in Labor history as the iconoclast who broke down a century of tradition is assured. Whether he ends up as the World's Greatest Leader (or Couldhavebeen Leader) or the World's Greatest Aberration is an altogether more intriguing question.

MUNGO MacCALLUM stood inside the colosseum for many years as a member of the parliamentary press gallery.
Slovenian Spring

In Ljubljana, in the north-west corner of Yugoslavia, the business day begins promptly at 8.30. In the crisp alpine air, the Slovenian republic’s capital city feels more like Austria than the northern frontier of the south slavs.

For centuries the region that now has borders with Austria, Hungary, Italy and Croatia lived contentedly under Hapsburg rule. Today the diminutive republic of two million people has its sights set on ‘joining Europe again’, this time as a sovereign state divorced from the Yugoslav federation.

Along the tranquil waters of the Ljubljanica River the Slovenes, twice as affluent as most other Yugoslavs, browse nonchalantly through the city’s tiny ski shops and Italian clothing stores. The business-as-usual tempo in Ljubljana betrays no sign of the turmoil that is ripping apart the Yugoslav federation. Yet the maverick republic’s dash toward independence is an integral part of the country’s crisis. On June 23 Slovenia formally seceded from Yugoslavia. In theory, Slovenia’s declaration will establish it as the first new nation-state in the post-war European order.

Unlike Serbia or Croatia, Slovenia lacks even a brief period of national independence. Next to the open-air market, the original Roman city wall marks the settlement that was overrun by westward fleeing Slavs in the seventh century. Not until the 1918 Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were the Slovenes members of a modern state. Serbia’s heavy-handed bid to dominate the kingdom led to its collapse, as well as a distrust of Serb ambitions that persists today.

Over the last decade, Slovenia’s liberal policies pulled the Slovenes ever further away from Yugoslavia’s deteriorating consensus. After a federal crackdown on communist party reformers in the 70s, the Slovenes responded from below. During the ‘Slovenian Spring’ of the late 80s, a thriving civil society here encompassed a plethora of social movements, from gay and feminist groups to a punk scene that rivalled anything in West Berlin.

The initial goal of the ‘new social movements’ was not to wrest power from the regime. Along the lines of Solidarity in Poland, the groups first sought to expand the public space outside the political power structures. A fiercely critical press also flourished with the grudging tolerance of the republican government. Before long, Slovenia’s wayward path brought it under heavy fire from the hardline federal powers. Civil society and the republic’s leaders quickly realised that in Belgrade they faced an enemy much greater than one another.

In Slovenia’s March 1990 elections, the first multiparty vote in post-war Yugoslavia, the Slovenes put the social movements into office and thanked the president of the by-then reformed socialist party, Milan Kucan, with the post of President of Slovenia. The movement coalition, called the Democratic-United Opposition of Slovenia (DEMOS), spanned nascent political ideologies from greens to Christian nationalists. The Movement for Religious Rights transformed itself into the Christian Democratic Party, and its leader became Prime Minister. Peace activist Janez Jansa took the post of Defence Minister and his friend Igor Bavcar, founder of the Protection of Human Rights Council, was named Interior Minister.

The elections put an abrupt end to the Slovenian Spring. Gradually at first, and then with abandon, the priority of independence subsumed the legacy of grassroots democracy. Jansa, the architect of a central European demilitarised zone during his dissent days, has presided over the republic’s full-speed ahead militarisation, including plans for mandatory military duty in the future Slovenian forces. Bavcar now dutifully enforces new laws that have tightened the borders and restricted immigration. The media has decried government tampering with the press as a throwback to the ‘ideological single-mindedness’ of the party state.

Graffiti in the busy pedestrian lanes of Ljubljana’s mediaeval town points the way to the Centre for Peace and Non-Violence. A narrow stairway behind the Yves Saint-Laurent boutique leads to the office where Sasha Gazdik and his colleagues work. They and the handful of other veteran oppositionists not in parliament agree that political discourse today pales next to that of a few years ago.

"Since the movement leaders came to power, civil society has evaporated," says the 28-year old Gazdik, his cluttered desk surrounded by anti-nuclear and peace posters in a dozen languages. "The state is behaving like states everywhere else. It has even stooped to manipulating ethnocentrism for its own ends."

Jansa’s defection was a particularly hard blow for his former co-workers. New taxes have been levied to pay for arming the military and conscientious objector status has been restricted. The logic: every other independent state has its own army.

Almost to a person, the Slovenes back some form of independence for the republic. Last year the newly-elected government first advocated a loose, reworked confederation of states in Yugoslavia. But as the federal powers dug in their heels against change and violence between Serbia and Croatia escalated, the Slovenes moved increasingly toward their own solution.

Critics argue that Slovenia, motivated above all by financial self-interest, only used the confederation idea to buy time for a full break with the other republics. The Slovenes have long griped about their funding of the impoverished south, despite huge export surpluses in trade with the other republics. Indeed Ljubljana’s politicians took precious little effort to strike a deal with Belgrade before they announced plans for unilateral succession.

ALR: JULY 1991
Slovenia hopes above all to remain part of the Yugoslav common market, explains Mitja Otopec, Deputy Secretary of the Slovenia Chamber of Economy. "If we could strike a deal on trade and the division of the debt, then we wouldn't have any serious problems going it alone. But that won't be easy.

With less than a tenth of Yugoslavia's population, the Slovenian economy accounts for 20% of gross domestic product and a third of total exports. While Slovenia's economic strength is unparalleled among the former communist countries, many of its industries would certainly buckle under the full rigor of Western competition. Slovenian firms are already lining up to declare bankruptcy, fuelling unemployment which reached 5.5% this year from only 1.8% in 1990.

The republic's free market transition has only compounded the effects of Yugoslavia's economic nose-dive. Slovenia's industrial production plunged over 10% during the first three months of 1991, still considerably less than the 20-30% drop throughout Yugoslavia. But, argues Otopec, even tougher free market measures are needed to facilitate Slovenia's integration into Western Europe. "If we want to be independent, we will pay a certain price," says the young economist. "That price is a lower living standard, at least for now."

The Slovenes are also in for a nasty fight over the country's foreign and external debt. Even by Slovenia's very modest estimates, its $1.8 billion share of Yugoslavia's foreign debt and $2 billion portion of internal debt is a staggering per capita average for the nation.

On every level, developments in Slovenia look tame compared to those throughout the rest of Yugoslavia. Yet here, too, the conservatism implicit in the search for an ambiguous national identity has made its mark. One of the state presidency's first acts was to declare an amnesty for all Slovenes who collaborated with the Axis powers in World War Two. Observers suspect that the republic's largely rural, Catholic population will eventually settle on a rightwing form of Christian Democracy for Slovenia.

Despite Slovenia's virtual ethnic homogeneity, 'guest workers' from the south constitute 15-20% of the workforce. The chauvinism that had de facto relegated Albanians, Macedonians and Muslims to second-class citizens in the past has intensified. Guest workers living in Slovenia, for example, were barred from the republic's referendum on independence last year.

In the 15-minute walk across Ljubljana, one senses that as a nation-state Slovenia's cozy charm would take the form of a claustrophobic provincialism. Although even oppositionists see no viable alternative to independence at this point, critics such as Ervin-Hladnik-Mihlaric, editor of the outspoken weekly Mladina, are sceptical. "The serious political problems that Slovenia is tackling are just too much for a region," he says.

Western European politicians are acutely aware of the magnitude of Slovenia's decision. Once Slovenia exits the Yugoslav federation there will be nothing to stop Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia from following suit. Nothing, that is, but the federal army and civil war. In central and eastern Europe, Slovenia's precedent could well spark a chain reaction in Slovakia, Silesia, Transylvania and beyond. Brussels eurocrats admit that their worry is not Yugoslavia or central Europe at all, but the hundreds of millions of refugees that nationalist wars in the Soviet Union would send west.

The international community's rebukes have not so much as turned the Slovenes' heads. Should worse come to worst, say some, Slovenia will simply join Austria.

PAUL HOCKENOS is a Budapest-based freelance writer.
The Labor supremacy in Australian politics seems to be drawing to a close. A new age of uncertainty looms. ALR assembled a roundtable discussion to assess the economic legacy of the Labor era, and to look ahead.

Tony Aspromourgos is a visiting fellow at the University of NSW. Mike Johnson is director of the Public Sector Research Centre at UNSW. Colm Kearney is professor of economics at the University of Western Sydney. Sue McCreadie is the economic research officer for the Textile, Clothing and Footwear unions. The discussion was chaired by Prudence Anderson, an economic journalist with the Financial Review.

It seems clear now that Labor’s hegemony over economic policy in the 80s is coming to an end. Probably most of the Labor governments around the country will fall from power within the next two years. This makes it timely to look at the Hawke government’s economic record over the last eight years. We first need to make some judgments about how successful the Hawke government has been in addressing the fundamental structural problems that have confounded all the social agendas that governments have tried to pursue for decades. You can’t go constructing grand social visions on a very shaky economic base. So: has the Hawke government been a truly radical government in terms of trying to come to grips with the economic problems facing this country?

Tony: Partly as a result of the way the Fraser government got burnt in the wages explosion of 1981-82, the basic strategy of the Hawke government from the beginning was built around employment growth within the Accord framework. Keating’s argument was that the most important policy from a social equity standpoint was full employment. I’ve got a lot of sympathy with that. The policy of pushing the system to full employment should be an essential plank for Labor governments in power nationally.

The problem is that within two years, after a bit of pump-priming and a bit of help from the end of the drought, they came up against the external constraint. In 1985-86 the currency started free-falling and the central question which arose from that was: is the Australian economy structurally capable of generating full employment? Given the current rate of growth in the workforce, you’re going to need probably a little over three and a half per cent real output growth per year to suck up that increase in the workforce
into jobs. Is that sustainable in our current situation? The answer that most people would offer is ‘no’.

The strategy of structural adjustment was really an attempt to overcome those constraints. The buzz-word has been ‘micro-economic reform’. I’d prefer to call it ‘competition policy’, because the basic logic of it is that an increase in competition will bring structural adjustment. I agree that full employment and a rate of growth consistent with that should be central to a Labor policy. The question is whether Keating’s version of competition policy can get us there, and if it can’t, what can, if anything?

So you’re saying that Keating really hasn’t spent enough time thinking about routes to adjustment.

Tony: He has, but he’s come up with a policy which I don’t think works. There’s a lot of moralistic, almost theological nonsense about this—people are saying this is the recession we had to have, as if it’s a cleansing experience. Well, you’ve got to get all that moral nonsense out of your head. The fact is that recessions do not restructure economies.

Mike: I think you’re generally right, but you’ve missed the role of investment. Australia in the 70s and 80s clearly had an investment problem. That was critical to the government’s priorities for structural change. Arising from the Campbell Committee in the 70s was the view that if you deregulated interest rates, and deregulation directed investment in the economy, you would get a flowering of entrepreneurial companies with new technologies and new directions. Associated with that, Keating specifically addressed the tax system to cure that investment problem. He did it in two ways. Firstly, he did away with the double taxation of profits. Then he reduced the top tax rates—adopting what has been the conservative view throughout the world during the late 70s and 80s, that if you redistribute wealth to the rich, they will invest it in productive sectors.

The truth of the matter was that they didn’t do that because there weren’t enough productive sectors to invest in. What they did was to go on a splurge in financial markets with a whole range of asset investments that have proved not to generate long-term real returns. The strategy to push structural change through redistributing wealth into new sectors collapsed on the rocks of the 1987 crash. And frankly, in 1991, the situation has not recovered. We’ve seen the rest of the speculative investments evaporate through the collapse of financial institutions in the late 1980s. That, as we look back from the 90s, was a critical failure.

Sue: We need to ask why there was this failure of investment. Was it simply a failure of Australia’s corporate leaders to actually make the right investment decisions and turn their attention to the productive sector, or was it a failure of policy, or a combination of both? It seems the environment which the government created was one which biased investment towards non-productive investment. When they removed accelerated depreciation as a trade-off for reductions in corporate tax, that created a bias away from manufacturing and back towards the financial sector.

Mike: The other thing that’s missing from the whole analysis is that Australia is integrated into the global economy. That is, we have become locked into a global financial system that has invested enormous financial assets, which were earned right back into the 1950s, in a whole range of speculative ventures, because real investment in productive enterprises in the sense of being concerned with tradeable goods and services has actually fallen away. So in the United States we have the Savings & Loans scandal, we have bank collapses in Britain, and in this sense Australia is just a follower, as it has always been a follower.

Colm: You asked: has the Hawke government been radical? And my answer to that is yes. Whereas previous Labor governments were concerned about the distribution of the national cake, as early as 1986, the World’s Greatest Treasurer realised his policies had to be concerned about the generation of the national cake. That was traditionally the concern of the Liberal Party. So, that was radical for a Labor Party. But the policies that followed on from it were conservative ones.

As I see it, these problems are that we have an entrepreneurial sector that is both inward-looking and has a short-term horizon. Look at Germany, for example, where the relationship between the banks and the industrial sector is such that both loans and investments are much longer-term than they are in Australia. In Japan you’ve also got a system where trade unions, business and government take long-term investment positions. They will actually operate at a loss over periods of between five years and a decade to wipe out the opposition in foreign countries so that they can create export markets. What has happened here is that the ‘level playing-field’, together with deregulation, means we’re tied into a short-term horizon and we’re going for short-term gains. So no matter what kind of indirect lever you pull, it’s not going to work.

If you look at the top 50 exporters in Australia, more than half of them are owned by foreign companies. That is completely at odds with all other major exporters in the world because we’re suffering from the historical result of a tariff system which was put in place to be purely inward-looking. The Right has used the abuse of the tariff structure in Australia to argue for a level playing-field, and that’s completely wrong; we have to tilt the playing-field in favour of exports.

If the problem has been one of improving the trade performance, presumably we have to discover how best we can provide a structure to do that, a way of setting goals and priorities...

Colm: It’s easy. We economists are taught that there are four goals of government: full employment; price stability; imports equal to exports; and economic development. The practical policy objectives put in place by governments usually also involve some level of inflation. But listen to Hewson: zero to 2% inflation. That’s absolute poppycock. In an open economy you cannot have a target for inflation which is set apart from the level of world inflation. We have targets on inflation, we have targets on unemployment.
have never heard of a target for exports. If you can target a composite aggregate like inflation, why can you not have a target for exports? What we need to do is to target export growth.

Sue: Colm pointed out that the government was radical because it was focusing on the size of the cake rather than simply the distribution. I suppose what was new about the union movement under the Hawke government and the Accord was that it too was focused on the size of the cake. But it had quite a different perspective. What it sought of the Accord was, first of all, participation in public economic management - something which has not really occurred. There’s been some element of participation through tripartite bodies like the Australian Manufacturing Council. But generally the old bureaucracies continued to exercise a very strong influence, while the new tripartite bodies had limited power to influence government decisions.

Colm: It’s poppycock to argue we’ve purchased low inflation

The unions’ agenda was modified in the light of both external circumstances and what was achievable in the context of government policy, but only aspects of it were ever implemented. There were the sectoral plans - the steel and engineering plans, the car plan and the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear plan — some more successful than others. But although history might tell you that it would have worked, you never have had that package implemented. There was a real failure to address that entrenched power in the bureaucracy — partly it’s inertia and partly it’s the dominance of that economic rationalist framework, which has had an overwhelming influence on decision-making.

Tony: I want to come back to this investment question. I agree that investment is the key to restructuring. The government seems to believe that profit share is crucial to getting that investment; in other words, that the overall balance between wages and profits was wrong, and had to be altered in the favour of profits. I don’t know why: this is the weirdest economic fashion I can remember in my short life. In fact, I know of no systematic theoretical argument, orthodox or otherwise, as to why profit-share should determine investment.

On the other hand, I don’t think the behaviour of investment in the 80s is particularly mysterious from a standard Keynesian point of view. After the recession of 1982-83, you had two years of strong growth; it took two years to rebuild demand back to something like normal capacity. And at that point in 85-86, if demand growth had continued, you would have seen investment demand respond. It was at just that time that the exchange rate collapsed, the monetary brakes were put on, and interest rates rose, and that’s what stopped investment from taking off at just the point where it normally would have, from a Keynesian point of view.

If there has been any real success from the shakeout of the last couple of years it has been the decline of asset inflation. I don’t think we should underestimate the importance of this. The old Australian entrepreneurial method of relying on asset inflation in excess of commodity inflation, and therefore concentrating on capital gains rather than trading and producing commodities, has suffered really serious blows in the last couple of years. As well there’s the fact that the entrepreneurs who specialised in reaping the benefits from asset inflation are going broke and some of them are possibly even going to jail. I think that is a really important event for the psychology of Australian entrepreneurship, and I think it will prove very beneficial.

As I said earlier, I do not believe this recession will restructure the economy. However, we can’t rewrite history now; this is where we are. It is very important to sustain our present low inflation rate, because that really is the only thing we have to show for the amount of working-class blood that’s been spilled in this recession.

Colm: I am pessimistic about Australia’s ability to sustain low inflation, because we have done nothing to restructure the economy into a low inflation path. It’s poppycock to argue that, as a result of the recession, we have managed to purchase a creed of low inflation. We haven’t. As soon as demand picks up, commodity price inflation is going to take off again, depending on the vagaries of the exchange rate. Also, we have built into the system five years of wage restraint just waiting to bubble over and build again into price inflation.

What would be required to generate low inflation?

Colm: I don’t believe we can generate permanent low inflation in this economy. Our inflation rate is tied to the rate measured as an average of the inflation rate of our major trading partners. And until we realise that, and build up our productivity and export performance, we’re not going to do it.

So you see it as a totally inappropriate target?

Colm: It’s completely off the planet. Our inflation rate is temporarily low; it’s going to catch up.

Tony: Colm raised the question of targeting exports. I have to say I am doubtful, if you look at the sort of trade surplus required for Australia to stabilise foreign liabilities, whether export growth is capable of carrying the burden of restructuring. I wonder whether we’re not also going to have to keep in mind import replacement.

Sue: That’s probably one of the major failings of the Hawke government’s strategy. There’s been an obsession with exports, and there’s been a move away from the initial goal of a more diversified manufacturing sector towards a more
specialised export-oriented one. The legacy of high tariffs has fostered the belief that tariffs alone are responsible for inward-looking and anachronistic practices and industrial lethargy. That in turn has tarnished the image of import replacement. That's a real problem because if you look at the approach of more successful economies you can see that in order to successfully replace imports you've got to have the latest in manufacturing technology; you've got to have high product differentiation; you've got to acquire all the things that the drive towards high value-added manufacturing and services require. But we've paid very little attention to this in the context of import replacement.

Colm: I agree that insufficient attention has been paid to import replacement. Rather the policy has been import curbing. That's of course the easier thing to do. If you want to replace imports, you've got to have an entire industrial policy, whereas if you want to curb imports, all you do is raise interest rates. And this government has gone for the easy solution. All I'm saying is, if you don't want to get caught in a cycle where you're dependent on external developments, then what you've got to do is raise exports.

Mike: That takes us back to the point Colm raised before. In other, more successful economies there's a longer time horizon and all the elements of the economic picture are interlinked. So, for example, German banks are interlocked with industrial concerns with an interest in exports. Yet in Australia this sort of interlocking of interests — which was in the sense the original intent of the Accord — has just never happened.

The most sustained attempt to achieve precisely those sorts of interconnections in Australia was of course in Victoria. Yet that legacy is now under a cloud. What happened in Victoria? How was it that a few major high-profile financial cock-ups eclipsed the value of all that was achieved beforehand?

Tony: There were two arms to the Victorian strategy — one of which I think was disastrously ill-conceived, and the other which may have survived if it hadn't been for the failure of the former. If I understand it correctly, the Victorian government believed it could run fiscal policy in the old-fashioned Keynesian way, independently of any back-up from the federal government. That was a fatal mistake. In severely constrained economies like ours there are grave limits on one's room to manoeuvre even at a national level. Moreover national governments have two things that state governments don't have, which make it much easier to cope with these constraints — they can dictate interest rates, and they can print money. Without that ability state governments can't set their own independent strategies at will. So Victoria should never have been in that game.

The other arm to the Victorian strategy was of course micro-economic intervention, which is clearly diametrically opposed to the Keating position on how to restructure the economy. And that I think had merit. It is a great pity that two or three disasters — albeit massive disasters, which will fiscally cripple Victoria for a long time — should be used to discredit the whole strategy. I don't know what the hell the VEDC was trying to do, but whatever they were doing they were screwing up very badly.

Mike: The Victorian problem was a managerial failure resulting from the inability of the political apparatus to ensure that enterprises were financially responsible and accountable. The government utilised the existing financial apparatus and leadership without imposing any strong controls to ensure that investment capital didn't go into the pockets of enterprises or organisations that in some cases may have been corrupt, but which more often were just incompetent. Now all the bright features of the Victorian economy, which were a few, have been lost in this overall failure.

Colm: The same happened to the first Mitterand government in France in the early 80s. He tried to pump-prime demand, to "ride it out", while in the US and Britain they were running really tight fiscal policy stances. Mitterand was forced to bring his economic policy back into line with his major trading partners. Likewise Victoria was running a looser fiscal policy, when the federal government was tightening the reins.

Tony: The fact is, recessions do not restructure economies

Sue: Victoria has the VEDC fiasco and Tricontinental disaster among others. But overlaying them all is the problem of the recession now — that is arguably the most severe problem in terms of employment and output, and it's caused federally by tight monetary policy.

Colm: We can point the finger if we wish at the level of business enterprise activity in Victoria, but have the austerity policies of the Greiner government in NSW done much better? I doubt it.

Connected to these questions are the trends in public sector administration and management over the 80s — which, as Mike points out, played a role in the Victorian debacle. Obviously there's been a revolution in Australia in the 80s around these sorts of questions. How does this revolution measure up now?

Tony: The key issue here is the shift towards commercialisation and corporatisation in public sector management. The Greiner Government in NSW has adopted these ideas with a great deal of ideological fervour — too much, in fact. But the federal government has also been adopting them much more quietly — possibly because it has to appeal to a different constituency.
I have to say — and I know this is unfashionable on the Left — that I personally am in favour of a great deal of this trend. I think the financial balance between the budget sector and the trading enterprise sectors in government expenditure was clearly wrong, and that there was a need to reduce the subsidy from the budget sectors to the traded sectors. A lot of the cross-subsidies, both within the traded sector, and between the budget and the traded sector, were really a product of a massive dose of pork-barrelling. They had no real social justice, or equity, or access rationale, and there was a need to redress that. I think it’s also true that the intervention of executive government in commercial government enterprises has an appalling history in Australia. The balance between accountability to the executive and ultimately to parliament on the one hand, and managerial freedom on the other, is a very complex question — much more difficult than either Carr or the Greiner government have understood. But nevertheless, I think the shift towards commercialisation is desirable and a good thing.

Mike: I agree that the government business enterprises were in need of shaking up, and the major enterprises within the sector — particularly electricity, water, and the banking system — needed to be put on a commercial basis. The truth of the matter is that in the past it wasn’t on a commercial basis and there was a regime of jobs for the boys — and there were plenty of them, too. The health of the government business enterprises is vital to all other sectors of the economy, and so it’s essential that they be run efficiently. The problem is that the debate has focused on reducing staffing levels, rather than restructuring them to become more effective and efficient. In the case of electricity authorities total efficiency means assessing not just supply-side efficiency but also demand-side and end-use efficiency. In the case of the transport system, the railways have to be adjusted to the needs and objectives of industry in Australia. Running rail lines to little towns may have a good social rationale, but even if it does it should be explicitly separated from the business objectives of the enterprise.

Did the labour movement ever really think that the conservative agenda for economic reform would work?

Sue: Those in the union movement who had an interest in industry policy always said this agenda wouldn’t work. We don’t really have a macroeconomic industry policy in the sense that none of the real problems about investment have been addressed. Tony earlier stressed the importance of aggregate investment. I think you have to break down that investment and look at the real failure to take up advanced manufacturing technology, and to look at things like flexible manufacturing systems in which Australia’s performance is very poor. I agree, in a sense, with those in the union movement who said that the corporate sector has a lot to answer for in its failure to take up the opportunities available to it. In fact the blame lies jointly with government and the corporate sector; the problem for the unions is that they don’t run either.

I feel somewhat pessimistic about the future of industry. If I wanted to look for a ray of hope then I would have to say that one of the great visions of the Labor government has been to try to modernise the economy. There has been a commitment to a new workplace culture. The national training system, the focus on the skills base, the centres of excellence and the drive to try to link R & D establishments to industry and to TAFE colleges, are all part of that vision. It remains to be seen to what extent all that workplace reform is a permanent change in the way we operate or whether a drive towards labour market deregulation under a Coalition government would undo it all. The idea of the workplace resource centres was that they would survive a conservative government because they were bipartite, and perhaps industry would have had time to see it was worthwhile. The German national training system has survived a conservative government and it’s something the country’s very proud of. So perhaps when we look back at the Labor government in five or ten years we’ll say that at least they laid the foundations in training and workplace reform.

This brings me to our final question. Here we are with our political cycle moving us towards what seems almost the inevitability of overwhelming domination by conservative governments-in-waiting with pretty hardline agendas. Yet elsewhere in the world these agendas seem to have been considerably discredited. How plausible are they for Australia in the 90s?

Tony: There is a strong feeling in sections of the Liberal Party that the Fraser years were wasted years; they had a tremendous mandate and controlled both houses — something which won’t happen again for many years — and basically they did nothing with it. The conservatives may have more backbone this time than last time, but the nature of our entrenched two-party system is such as to move parties towards the centre in government. So the crucial question is: how much of the rhetoric of conservatism in opposition will be translated into policy in government? I think you’ve got to be sceptical based on historical experience.

Colm: This era of Labor government is now going to end as it began, with Australia emerging from a deep recession. When the boom comes, it’s going to be a gradual boom in the United States, Europe and so on, and our trading constraints will be relieved even if we do nothing, so the conservatives will come to power shortly after the recession bottoms out. There will still be a rising economy when they go to the next election, and they will be judged as having engineered the emergence from the recession in the early 90s.

What are the implications of all of this for the labour movement and the Labor Party? We’re going to have a Labor Party in opposition with a diminished trade union movement. There’s going to have to be a fundamental rethinking of the role of the trade union movement in Australian politics and Australian economic policymaking. That is rather a pity, because one of the great positive contributions of this Labor government has been the enhancement of the standing of trade unions in the economic process. What is going to emerge from that rethinking process, I don’t know.
The Gloss Wears Off

In the booming 80s, women's magazines bloomed on the newsstands. Now the freeze has come. Jennifer Craik looks at the winners and the losers, and what it suggests about the 'new traditionalist' trend.

The sky seemed the limit for women's magazines in Australia. New titles jostled with one another in an apparently unlimited market. The newcomers were absorbed without difficulty. Australian women buy more magazines per head than any other nation in the world. It seems that women do not switch magazines, but simply add a new title to their shopping list. On average, one in five Australian women buys one or more magazines per month, compared with sales of one magazine for every sixteen to twenty women in other countries.

But, since 1989, magazines have been struggling to survive. With so many new titles, the advertising dollar has been spread thinly and the recession has reduced revenue significantly. On top of that, readership has been declining—about 30% across magazines. Some magazines, notably Harpers Bazaar, have gone to the wall while others are seeking new gimmicks to survive. The lifestyle magazine, Tempo, recently did a deal with The Australian to appear at three-monthly intervals as a freebie with the paper, thereby boosting its circulation from 25,000 to 85,000.

In the case of women's magazines, some have fared better than others. Business analyst, Neil Shoebridge, has suggested that the fashion magazines have been worst hit although Family Circle, Cleo and Dolly have also experienced declining sales. There is now a greater differentiation between titles and readerships. Women have endorsed the trend to niche marketing by becoming more selective in their buying habits and trying out new titles. Clearly, the broadening of ways to address women has been successful in market terms. However, the potential of niche magazines out of desk top publishing may be circumscribed by the stranglehold of the big two publishers over the magazine market as a whole.

But have women readers benefited from the expansion of the market and what will be the consequences of the current shake-out among women's magazines?

Service magazines such as Women's Weekly and New Idea have been the winners in the market stakes but at the cost...
of content. Most still address women in fairly conventional terms (concerning home life, personal growth and self-presentation) though many of the service functions (advice, home hints, crafts, human interest stories, fiction) have been partially sacrificed for a focus on stars, royalty and glamour. This change may be a result of the new magazines on the market which address issues, controversies and less conventional topics.

How women readers have reacted to these changes is unclear. On the one hand, it is easy to criticise service magazines for offering limited options for women constructing a limited set of role models and catering for a limited range of interests—from homemaking tips to escapist fiction and human interest stories. On the other hand, such magazines also raise more complex issues and occasionally profile successful or unusual women.

Readers may be highly selective in choosing what they read and whether they believe it. Moreover, much of the pleasure of magazines lies in the sheer anticipation and in the act of reading. As Judith Williamson wrote about the process of writing her book Decoding Advertisements: "As a teenager, reading both Karl Marx and Honey magazine, I couldn't reconcile what I knew with what I felt. This is the root of ideology, I believe. I knew I was being 'exploited', but it was a fact that I was attracted."

Ien Ang has noted a similar phenomenon in her book, Watching Dallas. Many of her respondents were leftwing, professional women who were hooked on the television soap despite their 'ideological' beliefs and lifestyles. One defended her devotion on the grounds that "Dallas is just so tremendously exaggerated, it has nothing to do with capitalists any more, it's just sheer artistry to make up such nonsense". Responses like these suggest that women are not passive consumers but actively negotiate popular media texts.

American feminist Betty Friedan recently commented in the new beauty magazine Allure that she "was very grateful for the support of Helen Gurley Brown in our early battles for equality. I enjoyed having that sexy Cosmopolitan Girl say that she loved her sports car and her new Chanel suit, but any man who wanted to attract her had to be for the ERA". She argues that women have developed an "autonomous, independent attitude towards fashion and beauty" and are not passive victims of the sexual sell. In other words, women use popular texts in complex ways which resist the overt messages of persuasion and exploitation.

While there has been some recognition of the escapist (cathartic?) function of soaps and romance literature, there has been less research on the ambivalent role of women's magazines. Reading may fulfil monitoring, voyeuristic and normative functions as well as simply being fun. Many women, especially working women, consume magazines as 'time out' from demanding schedules and workaday pressures. Magazines allow them to escape and vicariously enjoy the idea of handicrafts, cooking, fashion, looking good, and so on, compensating for not having the time to make and do such things. Whatever the interpretation of the reading habits of women's magazines, sales have
So, too, are well-known models and stars of television, cinema and popular music. For example, Cleo has frequently and successfully used expatriate model Elle MacPherson on its cover to epitomise the ideal Cleo woman. Each magazine has learned to choose its cover subjects carefully since the age and interests of specific readerships determine which face will boost sales of a particular title.

While the cover may attract buyers, there is evidence which suggests that women are increasingly dissatisfied with the content of many women’s magazines. The main complaint is that women’s magazines lack substance and engagement with women’s lives while emphasising ideals and fantasies. Yet it is not clear what women readers do want—or rather are prepared to buy. On the one hand, magazines which have tried to recapture the traditional qualities of service magazines have failed, but at the same time, those which have adopted a more progressive tack have had decidedly mixed fortunes.

Epitomising the revival of the traditional approach were Savvy and Now. Both launched in 1990, they lasted just three and four months respectively. Both were committed to endorsing traditional values “cooking, sewing and crafts, but with a very modern perspective”. Savvy, published by Murdoch, was aimed at young women (18 to 35) pursuing “normal” lives who had been “left a little lost by the turbulent and aggressive 1980s and the pursuit of material gain and career at all costs”. Valerie Lawson has suggested that Savvy was a throwback to Lord Northcliffe’s “women’s pages” which mixed fashion, self-improvement and household tips. Despite “widespread industry opinion” that there was a market gap for such a magazine, it failed, purportedly because it “had just been too boring”. Now has been a similar venture by Century Magazines aimed at a younger audience but it, too, failed to raise any interest (even after slashing the price by half).

Friedan accounts for “the new traditionalism” as part of a backlash against the new independence of women. Accordingly, magazines imply “that women are giving up careers when just the opposite is true”. Few women can afford not to work now. It may be this disjunction between the myth and reality that explains the failure of such magazines.

In contrast, other magazines have adopted a progressive format to attract “women who were not readers of women’s magazines”. The editor of HQ, Shona Martyn, has characterised its target market as “thinking women 28 and over” who were “dissatisfied with magazines on the market”. It is the only popular magazine on the market with an overtly feminist slant. Published by ACP, HQ developed out of the tired institution Good Housekeeping. It initially contracted the name to the initials, GH, and subsequently launched the new initials in the hope of cementing a new readership for the revamped magazine. Concentrating on articles that present “real” issues in a magazine that could be read and not just leafed through, HQ has attracted a small band of devotees, female and male. Although Martyn and publisher Richard Walsh believe that HQ is the kind of magazine that will become the norm of the 90s, its readership remains modest.

Two magazines launched within months of each other in 1989 also reflected a new approach to how women’s magazines should relate to the texture of women’s lives. Capricorn Press’s Iita borrowed the marketing slogan of the American Lear’s, namely an appeal to “women who weren’t born yesterday”. Iita was aimed at women who were articulate, probably in a well-paid career, possessing a comfortable standard of living and knowledgeable about the finer things in life. As a magazine, Iita balances entertainment, information and advertising relevant to its readership as well as exploring less glamorous issues (eg, the consequences of breast cancer for men). Despite its specific appeal to a reasonably small group of women, it has established an impressive market reach without the massive expenditure of other titles.

Similar in format but not so up-market or ambitious in scope, Murdoch’s New Woman has also sought to tap into the busy schedule of working women and homemakers. Its message, however, is quite schizophrenic, juxtaposing articles on coping with the demands on the new woman, with others justifying women who want to escape work.
pressures and stay at home. Much of its content concerns personal relationships (your man, his mother), sexuality and sensuality, dieting, fashion and role models. The American edition has been one of Friedan's targets. The Australian edition achieved phenomenal success at first, steadying to a respectable niche readership.

The most distinctive niche magazine, Portfolio, launched in 1984 by Mason Stewart Publishing, sought "to be in the vanguard for women who are just as unique as their magazine of choice", said former editor, Christine Hogan. Aimed at ambitious career women, it covers issues concerning work, finances, long-term planning, career and lifestyle, as well as fostering a particular genre of career clothing for professional women. In 1990, a slump in sales saw it put up for sale but, in the absence of a buyer, it has gone bi-monthly and its editorship has been assumed by Alexandra Joel, the publisher's wife, in an attempt to give the magazine a new gloss. Already Portfolio enjoys the most affluent reader profile of women's magazines.

The new Portfolio, the May/June issue, featured evergreen Candice Bergen on its cover, seeks the women of the 90s. Joel calls her "the juggler", the woman who is attempting to balance the often conflicting demands of career, children, personal interests and leisure pursuits, not to mention trying to keep the odd relationship aloft while, at the same time, struggling to preserve a modicum of sanity and some semblance of having a good time.

Of all the newcomers, it has been the Australian edition of Elle which has prospered at the expense of other magazines. Elle's assault on the down-under-market was well planned and well publicised. Published by ACF under licence from Hachette Publications, Elle had the Australian women's magazine market jittering a year before it hit the streets. Its selling point was its freshness compared with the perceived staidness of Vogue: Elle is "newer, it's international, it's more modern", said editor Debbie Coffey. Focusing on fashion, Elle cashes in on its French origins and implicit connections with trend-setting Paris which still dominates fashion myth if not reality. The "Elle look" is "le total look"—"slick, tres chic and terribly 'in'." So far as Elle is concerned with lifestyle, it emphasises "good" news designed to make readers "happy".

This is a long way from Elle's origins as a radical postwar Parisian magazine that is reputed to have revolutionised the marketing of fashion (from the elite to the masses on both sides of the Atlantic), broke the rules of fashion photography, supported the 1968 student uprising, organised the first International Women's General Assembly at Versailles in 1968 and employed Francois Giroud who went on to become France's first Minister for Women in 1974. Elle has expanded from Paris to editions in 17 countries.

Despite—perhaps because of—attempts to blend its international context with Australian fashion, interests and lifestyle, Elle Australia is an unremarkable magazine, much less interesting than its sisters which still sell well in Australia. Nonetheless, it has achieved a good grip on the market, forcing a significant slump in sales of Mode and, to a lesser extent, Vogue. Industry analysts suggest that a fierce war is going on between the three magazines as they fight to retain readership during this shakeout period.

Perhaps the most symptomatic lesson about the recent changes in women's magazines can be gleaned from the internal politics of New Woman. Somewhat in conflict with its promotion of new lifestyles and careerism of women, the publishers of New Woman replaced its editor, Julia Zaetta, while she was taking maternity leave. This episode does not augur well for the "jugglers" of the 90s. If it is indicative of the politics of publishing, readers hoping for new perceptions of women to be genuinely articulated in women's magazines will be disappointed.

And yet, Friedan has noted that women's magazines today present a "much more progressive" world than 25 years ago:

There is a much greater diversity of women in those pages—black, Asian and Hispanic. And the advice they give out implies autonomy, independence, and a lack of complete credulity or passivity on the reader's part. There's a complex richness to women's culture today that is a beautiful mix of feminism and femininity.

"The publishers of New Woman replaced its editor while she was taking maternity leave"

She has suggested that women "are trapped halfway on the road to full empowerment" and wouldn't be "suckers...if they were sure enough of the good possibilities for their own lives as women" and hence in a position to define their own ideals, strategies and life chances. White (p 288) has observed that the history of women's magazines shows that those which "show initiative and high editorial quality can succeed even where a market is reputedly saturated". In short, women's magazines would seem—in the words of that famous cigarette commercial—to have come a long way, but the messages are still contradictory and the dominant rhetoric conservative. Still, with more magazines on the market, maybe there is some hope that they will respond more rapidly to the changing circumstances of women's lives and reflect the greater range of options for women.

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Two events—the NSW election in May and the recent bitterly divisive leadership struggle between Bob Hawke and Paul Keating—have rewritten the script of politics for the near future. Their effects, clearly, have been quite different, but they have one feature in common; they mark the end of an era for left-of-centre politics in Australia. Labor's decade of triumph between 1983 and 1991 has been replaced by a new age of anxiety.

The significance of the NSW result is canvassed at length elsewhere in this issue of ALR. However, it raises one important point which is close to the heart of the argument I want to mount here. And that is that—with the exception of a few individuals—almost nobody, Right or Left, predicted the outcome of the election in NSW, and almost no one, once the result had actually been posted, could very clearly or coherently explain why it had happened. The mass media, in their confusion, leapt to the snake-oil explanations beloved of them—it was all due to bad slogans and PR, or the unpopularity of Mr Greiner as a leader. Forget for the moment that, prior to the election, no one in the media had seen fit to criticise any significant element of the Liberals' campaign, or that Mr Greiner was, by all the polling evidence, far more popular than Mr Carr. The result was, on the face of it, inscrutable, and any explanation had to be imported from outside, as it were—from the magical mirror-world of advertising and market research.

Just as importantly, though, few if any in the Labor camp realised what was about to happen. Labor, like the Coalition and the media, assumed that the political and economic circumstances—almost universally unfavourable to Labor—would inevitably create a certain electoral outcome: that, if you like, certain electoral effects can be 'read off' from certain external economic or political conditions. They were wrong, as such reasoning is always to some extent wrong. Political determinism of that kind

Follow the LEADER

The Hawke-Keating struggle dominated the media in June. But was it worth all the fuss? David Burchell argues that there's more to leadership than meets the eye.
Keating: Eyes on the hot seat.
more often reflects the outlook of the analyst than of society at large.

What the result highlighted, in short, was the poverty of the analytical armoury customarily employed by journalists and commentators to ‘explain’ politics. This is not to suggest that there is one, ‘real’, explanation to the NSW election result (or almost anything else), and that the ‘correct’ analysis (whatever that might be) will somehow yield that answer. But it certainly does suggest that there is some element missing in the framework used by media commentators to try to connect the happenings in parliamentary politics with those in the outside world. One way of looking at that ‘gap’ between politics and society in conventional political analysis is to look at the role of leadership in the recent tussle for the prime ministership between Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

One thing which couldn’t be said about the federal leadership challenge was that it was unexpected. The mechanics of leadership challenges are something the press gallery does know something about, and the fervid atmosphere of alliance and intrigue is, of leadership challenges are something the press gallery was near-unanimously of the tabloids, editorialised in favour of leadership in the recent tussle for the prime ministership between Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

One thing which couldn’t be said about the federal leadership challenge was that it was unexpected. The mechanics of leadership challenges are something the press gallery does know something about, and the fervid atmosphere of alliance and intrigue is, after all, the preferred habitation of the media’s opinion makers. It’s well known that Paul Keating wanted to challenge as early as January but was restrained by a number of factors including the Gulf War. We also now know why he felt the leadership was so rightfully ‘his’: Bob Hawke had promised it to him.

**“Hawke - defensive, snarling, and with a misplaced sense of his own gravitas”**

One of the most remarkable aspects of the challenge—or should it be called the first challenge?—was the breakup of opinions outside the hothouse climate of Parliament House. Just about every quality newspaper in the country, as well as a number of the tabloids, editorialised in favour of Paul Keating; the press gallery was near-unanimously pro-Keating; and nearly all the reportage after the event was certain that the Labor Caucus had made a dreadful mistake. By contrast, the opinion polls continued to be overwhelmingly unhelpful to Keating; Bob Hawke is hardly popular at the moment, whatever his backers may claim, but Paul Keating is still unreservedly loathed in the electorate.

How are we to explain this? Is there some crude form of capital-logic at work trying to force Keating to the prime ministership ‘in the interests of capital’ and against the wishes of the electorate? Hardly—unless Bob Hawke is to be considered some arch-nemesis of the business community. More helpful in trying to explain the line-up of forces in the Keating-Hawke struggle is to unpack the significance and symbolism of the two candidates in terms of the massive political drama being played out in Australian politics at the moment.

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the two candidates was their post-challenge press conferences. There was Paul Keating, cool, controlled and with a marvellous sense of the theatre of the occasion. And there was Bob Hawke, defensive, snarling, and with a distressingly misplaced sense of his own gravitas. The contrast exemplified at least one of the reasons which makes the press gallery such avid Keating apostles. Keating’s sense of theatre (or ‘vaudeville’, as he puts it, with his customary lack of respect for the pretensions of his audience) touches their deepest instinct that politics is, in the last resort, a kind of tragic drama in which the key element is the clash of forceful but fatally flawed personalities.

In this regard the press gallery is half right. It’s simply not adequate to say—as many on the Left have undoubtedly been muttering grumpily—that the theatre of the leadership struggle is a distraction from ‘real’ politics, that politics ‘out there’ in the community is the ‘real’ agenda, and that the Canberra theatre is consequently a sham. In the first case, the struggle over the direction of the government at perhaps the most crucial time in Australia’s modern political history can hardly be irrelevant. Perhaps equally significant, though, is the role that leadership plays in a symbolic sense in public political discourse. Leaders are important not just because, by smiling sweetly, they may win the hearts of people too foolish to know the ‘real’ issues at stake. Rather, leaders are important because into their public personae are poured a range of political symbols and images which do relate to real issues and policies, but which are expressed in this human guise, as it were, in shorthand form. It is in this light that the Hawke/Keating dichotomy becomes important.

Probably no one has exploited this merging of public persona with a repertoire of political symbols more successfully than Bob Hawke. So successful has he been that many people in the wider community simply associate the Labor Party with what they understand by the words ‘Bob Hawke’. This makes Hawke’s public persona (which is, we are told, quite different to his private personality) very important to him. In particular, we are told, Hawke hates to have his integrity questioned. Even more obviously, he hates to admit to lying, even when it is obvious that he has done so.

The media made much during the leadership tussle of the lack of credibility of a prime minister who lied to the electorate. More to the point, one might have thought, is the lack of credibility of a prime minister who can’t admit having lied to the electorate. The ability to admit one’s past untruths is a kind of badge of ordinary humility, a demonstration that the liar is willing to be taken down a peg or two. Bob Hawke’s inability to do that—his overweening sense of his own dignity—is the fatal flaw of his relationship with the electorate. Pinocchio, we are told,
discovered that when he lied his nose grew. In Bob Hawke's case, when he dissimulates—as he does so badly—it is his syntax, rather than his nose, which takes its revenge. The long rambling sentences start to unravel. And there is a glimpse of a private persona quite unlike that known to and beloved of the electorate.

Interestingly, though, while the mass media have been very conscious of the opinion polls which show Hawke's relative popularity with Paul Keating in the electorate, there has been remarkably little analysis of what this means in political terms. After all, the electorate empathises with Hawke not simply as an avuncular father-figure, but as a prime minister. One might wonder then what his prime ministership symbolises.

**"Keating, like Margaret Thatcher, is a 'conviction' politician"**

The dearest symbolic resonance in Bob Hawke's 'long-running love affair with the Australian people' (as unexpectedly sentimental journalists are wont to describe it) is compassion and a sense of the fair go. Compassion because the essence of Hawke's rhetorical appeal, amid the twisted syntax and half-hidden bad humour, is—to put it simply—a vocabulary of caring. At times this vocabulary of caring creates problems for Hawke, such as when he exhibits an almost desperate desire to have a more caring message to give than that which has often been available to him in the austere climate of the 80s. One could read his notorious 'No child will live in poverty by 1990' remark in this manner.

The essence of the child poverty message, as originally formulated, was that rational individuals who used government allowances wisely could raise their children's living standards above the poverty line—which is actually a rather bureaucratic and economistic way of looking at things, given that a great many people are not aware of their entitlements, and are thus unable to utilise them (even assuming that utilising them will indeed rescue them from poverty). Hawke was not content with this dour message: he wanted to demonstrate a government intervention which conscientiously and deliberately removed suffering from the shoulders of Australian children and parents. The resulting furore exposed his leadership to ridicule—and for a remarkably similar reason to that which currently has his leadership exposed to ridicule. Bob Hawke wants to be liked, but he wants to be liked in particular in the manner in which a kindly, caring parent is liked: to be trusted implicitly, and to be seen to have dispensed sympathy and shelter. If the message is seen to be bogus, the image very rapidly dissipates.

Not even Paul Keating's greatest admirers would claim that his image is of a caring leader. Rather he has acquired the unenviable image in the electorate at large of the cold and calculating 'economic man'—of an individual who weighs up the costs of economic decisions in the vocabulary of 'the macro balance' and 'the big picture'. Contrary to what some journalists may believe, this vocabulary has a rather narrow constituency. It may have impressed the finance sector in the 80s that a Labor treasurer could demonstrate such a consummate grasp of economic logic, and be able to present economic concepts with such disarming simplicity on the public stage. But to most people the vocabulary of economics is only sympathetic if they feel that they themselves (or their family, or their community) are benefiting as a result of all that lever-pulling and brake-holding. In the mid-80s, with record unemployment levels and a buoyant level of demand, this was plausible to many. In the early 90s it seems plausible to very few. This will be a terrific obstacle to a renovation of Keating's image should he actually become PM within the next few months. He will have to develop, not just a warmer image ("the family man" will undoubtedly be top of the list), but also a new vocabulary, and this will mark a sharp and possibly (for him) discomforting break with his established public persona.

However, there is another point to these widely divergent public images. The Labor image worked in the 80s because 'Labor' meant Hawke and Keating together, as a team. In other words, Hawke's caring vocabulary was plausible precisely because it was intertwined with the austere economic vocabulary of Keating, like sweet and sour. After all, most people are suspicious of an idle caring rhetoric—something which many on the Left are slow to realise. Those political salespeople, whether of the Left or the Right, who promise material gain without material pain, tend to be regarded with an often well-justified, lack of trust. This suggests that, whether or not Keating returns to the frontbench as leader, a Keating substitute will have to be found. Hence the microscopic attention to every utterance of the new treasurer, John Kerin, on the part of the media and the financial markets. There is almost a need for Kerin to slip into the Keating persona, to 'become' Keating.

All of this of course is hardly without significance for the government's policy direction, no less than for its public face. The decision of Labor's parliamentary Left to hitch its own fate to that of Hawke has prompted the inevitable jibes from the press gallery that the government has become a 'prisoner of the Left'. This is, of course, nonsense, except in the obvious sense that Hawke now personally relies on the Left's indulgence for his continued survival. However—though this has been little noted in the media—it was not self-evident that the Left would have pulled so firmly behind Hawke in the first place. That it did is worthy of examination, particularly in terms of the political symbolis of the two candidates.
Three reasons suggest themselves. Firstly, the Left hates Keating—with a vengeance, and not without reason. After all, in the 80s Keating seized the mantle of radical change from the Left and made it his own; henceforward the Left was reduced in the public eye to the status of a group of reactionaries, often arguing lamely for the return to the status quo ante of 1983 in economic policy. Moreover, the means with which Keating carried out his task of opening the Australian economy to the world were both deeply flawed and deeply antithetical to the Left. In the shortest political shorthand of the postwar era, ‘more market’ meant Right, and less meant Left. Whatever its other failings, Keating’s economic revolution in the 80s fundamentally riled the Left because it seemed to be unravelling the many incremental curbs on the market put in place over the postwar era, both by regulation and by the extension of the public sector. That most of the regulatory regime of postwar Australia was dominated less by a leftish desire for social justice than a pervasive political culture of pork-barrelling was thought to be beside the point. Keating was the acolyte of ‘the market’ and for that he will bear the Left’s continued disapproval, regardless of the ministerial ambitions of one or two disgruntled members.

Secondly, the Left has practical reasons to support Hawke. The claim that the Left now ‘dominates’ the government is palpable nonsense, as will rapidly become obvious to all but the most stubborn of commentators. However, for the pragmatic element on the Left led by Brian Howe, Hawke’s reign has been the time of an unprecedented cohabitation of the factions in government. That has been, of course, a very unequal partnership; the government’s dominant economic direction has increasingly been driven by a combination of the hardheads in Paris of the Centre Left and the Right, with most of the Left as virtual spectators. However, unlike other Labor governments, the Hawke government has operated by an uneasy style of consensus. Once it has become clear where the numbers lie, an effort is made to make decisions at least more palatable to other interests. And for those on the Left who accepted that the government was a government, and not (in Lindsay Tanner’s phrase) simply a collection of warring tribes, this has created the possibility for more practical influence on policy from the Left, within the basic direction of government strategy, than it has usually been within the capacity of the Left to exercise.

Moreover, this has been integrally associated with Hawke’s leadership style. He is widely described as being ‘a good chair’—of not pushing his own opinions (where he has any) too hard, and of generally resting with what he understands to be the feelings of Cabinet. On the other hand, Keating, like Margaret Thatcher, is a ‘conviction’ politician, and to the Left this suggests that, as a leader, he would try to lead by domination rather than cohabitation. And Keating’s origins in the NSW Right might be proffered in evidence for such suspicions.

Of course, the Keating of today is not the Keating of the NSW Right of the 70s, with all the bully-boy tactics and macho mateship which that culture exuded. Come to that, almost none of the senior Labor figures who have come to positions of power through the agency of the NSW Right are, in any real sense, part of that culture today—Keating, Richardson, Bob Carr all come to mind. To a large extent, the NSW Right remains what it always has been: a vehicle for ambitious working class boys made good to better themselves in the labour movement. The rest of its awesome reputation is largely window-dressing for that end.

Finally, the Left supported Hawke because, as I noted above, he symbolises the compassionate face of the government, and that compassionate face is more than anything else the province of the Left. It is in this respect that Keating’s departure might seem to open up new horizons for the Left in the government. A Hawke-Howe government might be interpreted as bringing a return to the ‘traditional Labor’ equation of Labor and compassion. (And the Coronation Hill decision might be proffered in evidence of that.)

Yet this is largely a mirage. As I’ve also noted above, compassion is hardly plausible without an economic strategy to sustain it—and an economic strategy dominated by the problems of the external constraint and its implications for the stance of fiscal policy. This should not be read as suggesting simply ‘a concern for the sentiment of the financial markets’, as one Left MP put it recently—although that can hardly be unimportant.

Nevertheless, it certainly does mean that the Left can’t simply wave goodbye to the Keating years. Important elements of the Keating strategy are effectively irreversible. Old-style regulation and protectionism is dead—though there is no reason on earth why the alternative has to be open-slasher deregulation or complete free tradieism. Above all, the external constraint is immutable. Australia’s place in the world economy forbids any simple return to old-style reflationism and expansionism. The heavy task of the Left is to reconstruct a Left politics which can move creatively and innovatively within these awful constraints. Waving farewell to Paul Keating will make surprisingly little difference to the weight of that task.

In that sense, Labor’s Left is guilty of the mirror-image of the problem which afflicts the press gallery. The press gallery associates Keating with all that symbolism of the economic process of the last few years for which it feels such enthusiasm, and which Keating, for want of a more tasteful way of putting it, made sexy. The Left associates Keating with all the features of the economic policies of the last decade it loathes. In each case this is to put far too much weight onto the role of Keating the individual, and far too little on the much wider forces he’s come to symbolise.

Win or lose in the continuing leadership duel, Keating’s legacy will be with Labor for a long time yet.

DAVID BURCHELL is ALR’s managing editor.
ALR SUPPLEMENT
LOCAL CULTURES
Introduction

In this supplement ALR presents four studies of cultural developments at the local level. 'Local' is a difficult term to pin down in the era of global communications and cultural industries. The more we hear about how many billions of people around the world shared the World Cup soccer or royal wedding, the more insignificant appear those cultural practices that are bounded by local spaces and attachments. Yet, for most of us, many of our cultural pleasures are primarily focused around the street, local shopping centre or backyard.

Several meanings for 'local' dominate in the following articles. The most common refers to local government, that level of public administration supposedly closest to the people. For too long, local governments have ignored their responsibility for cultural provision. While there has been a strong commitment to the provision of local libraries since the 1950s, in many areas this was the sum of council culture.

In the 1980s this began to change as many councils across Australia participated in the community arts officer program of the Australia Council which offered councils seedling funds to employ an arts worker. More recently, many councils have expanded their cultural services with the provision of arts centres, support for heritage projects, festivals, galleries, etc. The Australia Council's survey of local government cultural funding, published in March 1991, shows that in 1987-88 councils throughout Australia spent over $440 million on culture, an increase of more than a quarter in real terms since 1981-82.

While these figures offer hard evidence of growth in council supported culture, they also signal the emergence of a whole new set of political dilemmas. The most urgent of these is the problem of expansion without policy. Few councils in Australia have comprehensive 'cultural policies' that explain the principles of local government support and provide a framework for public accountability. Instead, the disturbing evidence is of ad hoc growth driven by a variety of forces. First, there is the availability of state and federal money for cultural projects, which means that the prospect of extra revenue drives cultural development, rather than any long-term program based on close understanding of local cultural needs.

Another important force is the changing nature of local government's economic base, and in particular the reduction in funding from other levels of government. While it is ironic that one of the few areas of real expansion in this situation has been culture and recreation, these services are facing growing pressure to be privatised.

Most performing arts centres, for example, are already designed to be self-funding after establishment. However, in other cases the threat of declining funds raises serious problems. The introduction of a user-pays system in public libraries, for example, threatens the very basis of democratic societies: free and equal access to information.

The downturn in the economy is also fuelling competition between councils who are all after new industries and tourists, often with serious consequences for local culture. In the frantic rush to attract investment many councils have completely ignored the cultural impact of large-scale industrial, retailing or tourist developments. This highlights the need for councils to see cultural policy as more than just a rationale for the provision of various services. When cultural resources are integrated into economic and urban planning, the benefits in improving quality of life and generating both profits and pleasure are substantial.

The case studies that follow therefore address the issue of public interven-
In Australia, cultural industries are rarely considered in strategies for local economic expansion. Instead, the major emphasis has been on manufacturing and sunrise industries which are seen as properly productive. This approach has marginalised the service sector in which leisure and cultural industries are increasingly important.

The term 'cultural industries' refers to that sector of the economy organised around the production and consumption of cultural goods and services. This includes organisations like cinemas, theatres, galleries, museums, bookshops, radio and TV stations, libraries, theme parks, festivals, live music venues, etc. These cultural organisations take varied economic forms ranging from the multi-national, to the small business, to the non-profit. The significance of the term 'cultural industry' is that it reflects the diversity of what people experience as culture. It also offers a challenge to the very value-laden cultural distinctions such as high and low, art and entertainment or subsidised quality and commercial rubbish. Most importantly, a cultural industries approach recognises the predominance of the market in meeting most people's cultural needs.

In sharp contrast to the traditional Left pessimism on mass culture exemplified by the Frankfurt School, cultural industries began getting a very good press in the 1980s. The 'discovery' of cultural industries was most prevalent in Britain, where numerous local government authorities began hailing them as the source of both economic revival and urban renewal. Glasgow is probably the most often cited example of cultural led economic recovery, rising from the ruins of a collapsed shipbuilding industry and born again as a cultural tourism mecca bristling with art galleries, garden festivals and riverside retailing.

There are two related themes in the British cultural industries literature. The first argues for an integration of cultural policy with economic and social policies on the grounds that cultural considerations are central to good social planning and economic development. For example, the growth of enormous shopping malls on the outskirts of towns has often meant the end of a lively, viable and accessible town centre. These retailing developments have cultural and economic impacts yet, in the rush to attract new investment, these cultural impacts are often ignored. Arguments for a 'cultural urbanism' or cultural planning point to the crucial role of numerous cultural activities from arts centres to record shops, to street life in producing popular, safe and inclusive public spaces.

The second theme focuses on the economic importance of arts and cultural industries. In many centres industries involved in cultural production, distribution and/or consumption are now major employers. It is no longer possible to relegate culture to the margins of the economy. For example, in London the largest manufacturing sector is printing and publishing while 30,000 people are employed in the music industry. Studies of patterns of leisure consumption also reveal an increasing preference for cultural commodities they in the form of magazines, video hire or visits to heritage houses. These studies highlight the dominance of commercial forms in most people's everyday cultural practices. They also point to the need for new public strategies for culture which focus on intervention in the market rather than subsidy to pre-20th century cultural forms which have limited reach and appeal.

For the last 18 months we have been working on a research project investigating the role of cultural industries in local economic development. One focus has been the Parramatta local government area—an area which formerly comprised the outer western suburbs of Sydney but which, in the last two decades, has become a populous city in its own right.

Local cultures often bear little relation to the world of the Australia Council. Gay Hawkins and Kathie Gibson look at the real face of culture in Parramatta, NSW.
The research project has had two complementary aims. First, to write cultural industries onto the agenda of local economic strategies in order to highlight their potential for producing both profits and pleasure. And second, to shift the attention of cultural policy-makers away from the aesthetic or welfare value of culture and onto a consideration of its economic organisation and benefits. This article focuses on some of the major political and economic issues that have emerged from this research to draw conclusions about the field of cultural planning more broadly.

Both cultural planning and cultural industries shaped our approach to researching Parramatta. In seeking to apply these concepts to a study of one local government area, we wanted to answer a range of questions:

1. How significant were cultural production and consumption to the local economy?
2. Was a strategy for public investment and co-ordination of cultural industries viable?
3. What were the cultural impacts of various planning decisions on the spatial organisation of the city centre?
4. What should be the role of local government in progressive cultural provision and regulation?

Production and distribution of cultural commodities and services in Parramatta take place under a variety of different relations of production. At the most industrially advanced end of the spectrum are the three cinema complexes owned by the major exhibition chains: Greater Union, Village and Hoyts. Programming for these cinemas is handled centrally at national head offices and the majority of films screened are produced in Hollywood. Ticket sales are computerised and information concerning audience size for any one film at any one time is electronically transferred to head office daily.

The primary audience for the cinemas consists of young people in the 15 to 25 year age group. Families and elderly people comprise a very small fraction of the local market. Competition for the youth market is fierce and this is reflected in the common programming decisions made at the cinemas.

Cinemas in Parramatta are highly capitalised and automated. The labour input is small and low-cost and turnover is high. The links to the local economy are miniscule in terms of employment and, as a generator of local economic spin-offs, are probably limited to the delivery of a youth market to adjacent restaurants and shopping centres.

Live entertainment is produced in a variety of theatres, pubs, clubs and nightspots. The smaller nightclubs offer live bands and a bar, and are generally owner-operated with low levels of capitalisation. Apart from site rental or ownership, furnishings of the club and sound equipment, major costs are the wages of the small casual staff.

Capital outlay on food and beverages is recouped at profit from the predominantly 18 to 25 year old clientele. Indeed, it is the sale of these commodities from which the bulk of the profit is made. The actual bands and the music they create on site provide a drawcard for the more profitable consumption of food and liquor. Bands are paid according to their reputation and, in many cases, the band itself will barely cover costs the musicians being reduced to the status of almost voluntary workers. As is the case with many cultural industries it is the owners of the distribution outlets rather than the cultural producers who make the substantial profits.

Much larger venues for entertainment are provided by the Leagues and RSL clubs and the Riverside Theatre. The Parramatta Leagues Club hosts a variety of weekly discos, bands, bingo sessions and one film per week. It caters to two main markets: 18 to 25 year olds and the 45 plus age group who come for the bistro, bingo and pokies. This is a profitable business which earns money for the local football team and has recently expanded. By contrast, the Riverside Theatre, a large-scale bicentennial-funded cultural centre across the road from the Leagues Club, is still struggling to make money.

The only significant broadcasting production in Parramatta is the state-wide radio station 2KY which is owned by the NSW Labor Council. Yet, while broadcasting production in Parramatta is minimal, consumption is not. The most significant reorganisation in cultural industries over the last ten years has been the phenomenal rise of cheap home-based technologies from video to CDs. The growth of the home entertainment centre is reflected in declining attendances at cinemas and football. Most people now spend more on domestic cultural consumption than on getting out for a 'bit of culture'.

The final significant cultural sector in Parramatta is that of museums and heritage sites. These are in relative abundance around the fringes of the city centre. They are run by an eclectic array of non-profit, publicly-funded organisations such as the National Trust, the Historic Houses Trust, and the Parramatta and District Historical Society. The management of these sites manifest many of the characteristics of the community services sector. They are run primarily by voluntary labour, most of the volunteers being middle-aged women who live outside the area and identify themselves as 'heritage hounds'. The main audience for this history is primary school age children who are bussed in from all over Sydney, and middle-aged tourists and visitors to the region. Admission charges are low and do not cover the costs of upkeep let alone acquisition of artefacts.

While Parramatta can clearly lay claim to having significant historical resources, this reality has been drowned by the suburban swamp of what was once a discrete centre and more recently by the emergence of a modernist townscape. Local history and its packaging is generally controlled by outside organisations such as the National Trust and the result is a fragmented historical enclave totally divorced from the local community. The main audiences for this history come from outside the region and there is a sense in which these historical resources are run almost as a secret society. Only those 'heritage hounds' in the know seem familiar with the irregular and idiosyncratic opening hours.

What this brief summary of the data reveals is a series of difficult problems about the viability of an industrial
strategy for cultural industries in Parramatta. In Britain, aggressively pro-active approaches to local economic development emerged in several Labour-controlled regions in direct response to Thatcher’s economic assault on urban infrastructure. The strategies focused on regenerating local economies and making them accountable to local needs. Cultural industries fitted well into this model because they represented both a potential growth area as well as addressing often ignored constituencies.

Translating this approach to Australia is almost impossible because of the very different structure of local government here. Not only does local government have a much smaller revenue base but it is also trapped in a complex system of grant and policy dependence with state and federal governments. While there is a concern to expand regional economies, local government is in a weak position to do this because lacks the resources to pursue pro-active investment and it cannot be really effective in the role of planning and management of industry development without parallel initiatives at the state and federal level.

These factors make the idea of a ‘local’ economy difficult to mobilise. Structures of space, macroeconomic issues and public policy all work against any clear-cut identification of where the local ends and the regional, state and national begin.

Beyond the wider problems of local economic development is a series of more specific issues which emerge from the nature of cultural production, distribution and consumption in Parramatta. The first relates to the very low level of cultural production in the area. Parramatta is definitely not London. It is not a site for any major cultural output, nor does it appear to foster much independent or fringe cultural production. This is not to deny the vast diversity of cultural practices which shape everyday life but, rather, to acknowledge the limited amount of organised or industrialised cultural production. According to Garnham, it is the small record labels, fringe theatre groups, student fashion designers, garage bands and so on which provide the research and development for larger cultural corporations. This is the crucial source of innovation and diversity in cultural industries and a primary target for imaginative public investment.

In Parramatta there could be two responses to the reality of little cultural production: to focus on developing the distribution and consumption aspects of cultural industries; or to investigate mechanisms for stimulating more local cultural production. These approaches are not mutually incompatible. The technologies for small-scale, local production of anything from music to magazines are cheap and easily available. Their major advantage lies in their capacity to express diverse communities of interest, whether it is young fans of heavy metal music or the local old-time dancing club. However, without an established cultural production sector, the major benefits of investment to promote more local output would be social rather than economic. It is obviously more cost-effective to develop the economic potential of existing industry sectors rather than create them from scratch.

Distribution and consumption dominate the structure of cultural industries in Parramatta. Like virtually every other area in Australia the heartland of cultural consumption is broadcasting and it takes place in the home. There is little a local authority can do to intervene in what flows into TVs and radios every day. The big questions about Australian content levels, foreign ownership, networking, pay TV and so on are the responsibility of a diverse array of federal departments and regulatory bodies. However, at the same time as the technology for a global culture emerges so, too, does the possibility for a genuinely local broadcasting sector. Although community TV and radio are underdeveloped and generally ignored by local government, they offer interesting models for alternative, locally-controlled broadcasting.

When people do go out in Parramatta it is to a fairly restricted range of cultural activities which appeal to very distinct markets. Public intervention in distribution could be geared to addressing new audiences, at reaching those currently unable to participate or uninterested in the existing cultural repertoire on offer. Although there is little available data on audiences, it is possible to identify some groups whose participation levels seem particularly low. Families with young children do not appear to be well serviced by either public or private cultural organisations.

Obviously this constituency has restrictions on both time and money but innovative programming and distribution networks could begin to address this potential audience. For example, if the Parramatta Council bought the Roxy cinema it could use it as a centre for the distribution of cheap movies targeting new audiences. It would also rescue a wonderful
Another angle on cultural industries that we investigated was their links to other sectors in the economy. The most obvious connection is between cultural industries and retail consumption. The recent trend towards installing cinema complexes in or adjacent to shopping malls highlights the way in which these two sectors create markets for each other. The lesson of the recent history of the Parramatta CBD is how the possibility for creating a distinctive cultural precinct was undermined by the flow of capital into retailing.

Parramatta was colonised by Westfield Corporation in 1974 when it began construction around an existing, free-standing department store. Not until the mid 80s was any attention paid to the impact of this development on the rest of Parramatta’s retailing area. At this time the declining trade in shops along the main street, Church Street, had reached crisis point. Worst affected was David Jones (known as DJs), the other major retailer stuck at the very end of Church Street, far from the action in Westfield Mall.

In the early 80s the state government decided to relocate government offices out of the Sydney CBD to Parramatta, making it more of a regional business and office centre and less of a retailing centre servicing locals. As locals drifted to more accessible shopping malls elsewhere, well-heeled public servants began to dominate as the major consumers in the Parramatta city centre. Supermarkets closed down in favour of more up-market boutiques catering to lunch-time shoppers. The middle stretch of the main street was badly affected by these developments, acquiring a black hole, badlands image which fuelled council’s anxieties.

In 1985 the council acted to stop the decline by closing the middle section of the main street and converting it into an outdoor mall. This had all the familiar hallmarks of a low key, low capital investment rearguard action: redirect the traffic, install paving, seating and the ubiquitous performance space and then hope for the best. The following year work commenced on the Cultural Centre across the river. It was hoped that the Cultural Centre would create a focus and drawcard for the dead zone at the northern end of the main street.

A key player in this saga of Parramatta’s main street is the property development company Merlin. Their joust with Westfield is a telling reminder of how much the spatial organisation of city centres is a product of corporate competition and the flow of capital rather than rational planning and good design.

Merlin was formed in 1987. The company had developed expertise in harbourside festival retailing schemes, redesigning Sydney’s Darling Harbour and Manly pier. For Merlin the dank stretch of river separating DJs from the Cultural Centre had possibilities as a waterfront retailing development. A cultural/leisure precinct was envisaged, with ‘Rivercentre’ offering 24-hour speciality retailing, food outlets, terrace cafes, waterfront restaurants, entertainment and amusement facilities.

The proposal was to turn Parramatta around to face the river, the source of first white settlement. For years the city had focused on the railway, with its back to the river. This orientation emphasised commuting. In their rediscovery of the river Merlin promised to revitalise the badlands, rescue DJs and provide desperately needed audiences for the Cultural Centre. A leisure/cultural precinct would give Parramatta a focus for street and night life plus all the benefits of a 24-hour economy. This was a developer led cultural plan for Parramatta.

Meanwhile, at the other end of town Westfield sat back and watched. There was an eight-month delay over the development application as battles were fought over who would meet the costs of the mall closure, traffic management provisions and numerous other details. Merlin became bogged down in local government bureaucracy. A shock report revealed that the ground floor of the Rivercentre would be flooded in the event of a one in 100 year flood.

Then Westfield announced yet another major expansion. Land it had purchased adjacent to its current site was rezoned for retailing and their proposal to include pedestrian walkways to the new site and a tunnel under the railway bridge to connect the whole complex to the Church Street mall was approved by council. The final feather in Westfield’s cap was DJs announcement that it would relocate to this new development. Merlin was being abandoned on all fronts—the council, DJs deflection, the credit squeeze and the power of Westfield all combined to destroy its cultural plan for Parramatta. In March 1990 the Rivercentre project was dropped.

With hindsight, Merlin’s cultural plan seems very sophisticated. As a developer-driven strategy for a cultural precinct, Rivercentre stands out as an enlightened attempt to revive the badlands end of Church Street. Merlin seems a long way ahead in understanding the potential for aligning cultural development with economic expansion. Not only could Rivercentre have helped to feed new audiences into the Cultural Centre, it could also have ended its desperate isolation. Yet, while the council stalled over this proposal, Westfield, with a proprietorial force, consolidated its position at the other end of town. Merlin, the Cultural Centre and Parramatta residents were the losers. This saga is an example of bad cultural planning by default.
Cultural planning is rapidly becoming a term with almost as much ambiguity as community arts. In Australia several approaches dominate. Often cultural planning is used to mean little more than community development. Here the emphasis is on getting the community together to identify common cultural resources and plan for their management and protection. While this focus on public participation and control over planning is perfectly reasonable and long overdue, there are several problematic assumptions which underpin this approach.

First, it often relies on a technique known as ‘cultural mapping’ which is aimed at tracing the nature of local attachments to place. The outcome of this is supposedly the identification of a common culture and regional identity. This approach assumes that culture is consensual, that a region or locality will easily be able to identify a common culture which it will then plan to develop and protect. Romantic references to ‘our town, our culture, our map’ completely ignore the reality of the conflicts that surround the different cultural identities and interests which cut across any region. They also focus on the construction of a local identity, on the identification of a ‘unique sense of place’ in order to establish difference and distinctiveness. This process, in particular, is driven by the desire to attract tourists. Ultimately, cultural mapping emphasises process at the expense of outcomes. Getting ‘the community’ together to develop a cultural plan is given top priority because this is regarded as empowering. Cultural planning is reduced to a technical process in community consultation, with culture assisting in social integration and harmony. The economic and political dynamics which profoundly influence culture at the local level are generally ignored.

Our research at Parramatta highlights the naivety of this approach. For a start, it is almost impossible to identify who is the community for this locality. Is it the service workers and bureaucrats who pour into the town centre every working day and who are the major consumers in the retailing centres? Or is it the people who live there and are the main audience for the variety of cultural and leisure organisations?

Apart from this, it is obvious that ‘planning’ in the Parramatta LGA is far from being a simple technical procedure. It is a deeply negotiated political process in which Council seems to be more reactive than pro-active. There are numerous battlegrounds which make up the city’s economy and Council does not appear to be the referee. The flow of capital into retailing and state government decisions to decentralise various government departments have been the major forces in the spatial and cultural organisation of the city centre. Council’s one significant cultural initiative—the construction of a temple to high culture in the declining and isolated downtown section—only highlights how ignorant it was about the potential benefits of cultural activity to the local economy, and about the potential exchange of markets between retailing and cultural facilities. Cultural industries and cultural planning offer important insights into the intersection of cultural and economic processes. While our research has identified problems with the wholesale application of either model to the Parramatta LGA, this does not undermine their political value in providing more progressive approaches to understanding and intervening in local cultural organisation.

Both approaches highlight the need to investigate the political economy of culture, to understand cultural production, distribution and consumption in industrial rather than aesthetic terms. While our research began with the desire to develop a local economic strategy for culture, the Parramatta example has shown the need also to explore a local cultural strategy for economic expansion. The demise of the main street in Parramatta is a disturbing example of the power of retailing corporations to erode any sense of amenity and civic culture in town centres. Hopefully, good cultural planning can offer councils a strategy for dealing with the brute economic power of developers.

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Brisbane is Australia's (and one of the world's) largest metropolitan local government authorities. Its annual budget is pretty close to that for the whole of Tasmania. As a metropolis, with an identity as such, it is still emergent though the 'Expo factor' played a major role as a catalyst in its modernisation. Brisbane has not yet experienced, to any significant extent, any of the major problems associated with urban degradation though some of these are beginning to emerge.

During 1990 the city underwent the most intensive dose of urban planning and policy development in its history in the form of The Brisbane Plan: A City Strategy and the Inner Suburbs Action project. This was fertile ground for our own modest contribution of cultural planning and a cultural development strategy drawn up in consultation with both council officials and communities.

As a first step we had to establish some preliminary ground rules about what 'culture' actually means in the urban context, why it should have a policy framework attached to it and what it can actually do in the broader context of urban development. We had to establish a legitimate and acceptable currency for the concept of culture. Culture means the Cultural Centre, yes, but also street furniture and urban design; it means community arts, yes, but also the leisure and entertainment marketplace and industry; it means Tea Dances for the over 55s as well as provision of skateboard and BMX ramps and bowls; it means museums and galleries but also retailing profiles and strategies in inner city and suburban areas from 'ethnic shopping' to 'festival retailing'; it means the provision of performance, production and display spaces for small-scale cultural industries in media production, arts and crafts, fashion and design, and it means tourism strategies; it means the management of heritage resources in both the built environment and in the less tangible resources of ethnic and indigenous communities.

It means quite a lot, in fact, and cultural policy and planning is concerned with making appropriate and enabling connections across this diverse field of activities and institutions. Culture, in short—and this was an important rule of thumb for the Brisbane project—is what counts as culture for those who participate in it. From the point of view of policy formation at this general metropolitan level, it was important for us to be both agnostic and pragmatic in the evaluation of culture and cultural resources and to refuse any hierarchy of cultural activities.

So this was a cultural policy for urban development in which 'arts' occupy only one part of a fairly broad spectrum of human activities. If you go for an arts policy you are stuck with an agenda which, in both popular and specialist opinion, has opera at one end and community arts at the other; and all you can do on that agenda is argue for a different ordering of priorities: you cannot change the agenda itself when you are stuck in an arts rubric. We felt it important to step cautiously to one side of this more traditional agenda and look in different directions.

Hence we adopted (and adapted) a whole language which might seem at variance with traditional arts concerns. We used terms like 'cultural industries', 'cultural precincts and corridors', 'the role of culture in economic development', 'mixed use and adaptive development' 'the cultural element of social and economic planning', 'quality of life' and even...
the 'cultural element in economic development scenarios'. We were not preaching to the converted but to hard-headed budget, planning, and economic development administrators and policy makers who may not have thought of the place of culture in their scenarios for Brisbane's economic development.

It was very important to persuade the people who make policy that culture matters from the point of view of hard-nosed economic development and, equally, from the point of view of access, participation, equity and social justice—even if their view of culture sometimes remains tied to an idea of 'prettification'. This was not a tactical ploy on our part. A 'cultural industries' orientation such as was developed in London in the early 80s, in several other cities in the UK, in Rome from the 70s and all over France from the mid-70s has enormous potential in:

* providing the necessary infrastructure—the human, economic, physical and spatial resources for cultural development. This may entail the establishment of vertically integrated 'media zones' as has recently happened in Birmingham and Sheffield in the UK to revitalise inner city areas, kick-start local industrial development and provide employment and a quarry of local talent for the arts, leisure and entertainment industries.

* getting those concerned with cultural affairs actually to turn their attention to what really counts as culture for the majority of the population. This may involve, for example, community arts workers acting in the role of 'broker' between local performers, musicians, visual artists, etc, and the cultural marketplace of pubs, clubs, media production agencies, government departments, architecture and design firms, developers and so on. For example, the Community Arts unit in Brunswick, Melbourne, has recently acted in this way by setting up its own record label. It means community arts workers thinking of themselves more in the role of managers and facilitators of community cultural resources across the board.

* addressing access, equity, participation, employment and training issues. This 'mainstreams' cultural policy not to the extent of making it 'official' but to the extent of addressing the majority of people's lives. This means talking about culture in relation to shopping, urban design, mall development and custodianship of the built and natural environments which are full of cultural meanings and characterised by diverse daily cultural uses. And, in the urban context, it means addressing the nature and meaning of civic culture or the 'civic realm' and shaping policy on access to, participation in and identification with the texture and quality of city life from which many groups remain marginalised. Women's access to city centres is a particularly important issue here as is the perception of the city centre, its resources, its 'official' image and presence by ethnic and Aboriginal communities and young people.

Ken Worpole's recent work in the UK especially (with Geoff Mulgan) Saturday Night or Sunday Morning: From Arts to Industry—New Forms of Cultural Policy and the more recent collaborative project City Centres, City Cultures, focuses on some of these arguments. We drew a lot of material and ideas from this work as we did from some of the initiatives of the organisation, Partners for Livable Places, in the USA and from the work of Augustin Girard in the French Ministry of Culture and Communications. These all provide invaluable resources for some new thinking about cultural policy which moves it away from the compensatory, 'missionary' and therapeutic logic of some traditional arts programs. They address issues of access, equity and participation within the framework of more general objectives for social and economic development at the level of the locality, the city, the region, the state or the nation.

Having established these principles as a starting point, you may find that you have launched yourself into the whole of human life but, as one senior arts administrator from the Queensland state government put it, "we are all in the leisure industry now" and, as with all industries, due attention needs to be paid to the allocation and distribution of resources. From the point of view of policy formulation and equity, it is much better if you use language like this than if you rely solely on the more traditional 'motherhood assets' of creativity, expression, aesthetic appreciation, the civilising ethos, identity and so on. These 'merit goods' and 'externalities' arguments used by many arts economists will necessarily position culture as a dignified and worthy but poor cousin in need of handouts. There are other ways of approaching the issue.

With these principles in mind, and in order to give us some purchase on the whole of human life we drew up a five-point policy framework to establish cultural planning as an integral part of urban development initiatives. The heading and rationales we used were as follows:

1. The General Policy Framework: Cultural Planning for Quality of Life

To establish 'quality of life' as an objective entails the formulation of a policy framework for cultural planning along with appropriate organisational arrangements and budgetary allocations. Motherhoodish as 'quality of life' may sound, it is worth stressing that it has an increasing currency as a general framework for policy development in two key areas:

Quality of life has now become an important unit of economic calculation. A 1984 US report by the Real Estate Research Corporation noted the 'surprising finding...that quality of life ranked third overall (among criteria for industrial location), carrying the same weight as utility costs'. Quality of life means quite simply the physical, historical, cultural and social attractiveness of a place: features in which cultural resources from urban design to information strategies have a major role to play.

In addition to these economic calculations, there are the direct and more diffuse social benefits of deploying cultural resources in urban development to foster civic and local identity and to facilitate participation in and management of community assets.

2. Culture and Economic Development

Establishing culture as a legitimate sector of economic activity is a further important move. There are three key elements to this: the first a more or less traditional defence of the economic benefits of existing cultural activities,
the second and third are related to the emerging agenda of cultural development.

Firstly, spending on cultural activities has a 'multiplier effect' of a factor of approximately 1.5 on income and employment in local economies. People going to the cinema, galleries, museums and festivals spend money on bus or taxi fares, on meals in restaurants, or related publications and so on. This produces significant medium to long-term effects on the local economy in terms of employment, income and domestic product.

Secondly, a broader and more strategic issue than that of the 'economic benefits of the arts' as traditionally understood is the recognition of the key role of contemporary cultural industry development in forms ranging from publishing to television, video production and design. The 'post-industrial' society which is evident in the development of information and communications technology, the significant proportion of Brisbane's workforce in the leisure, tourism, recreation and personal service sectors and the emphases in various policy statements on clean-industry and information-based development mean that the 'cultural industries' will have a significant role to play in the city's future development.

The cultural industries comprise the print and electronic media including publishing, film, television and video production, graphic art and design, the leisure and recreation sectors, music and advertising. An arts and cultural policy framework which is concerned only with largely 'pre-industrial' traditional cultural forms is prone to miss out on where culture is now being made and defined. It is important therefore to think of cultural resources as components of local economic development strategies.

Thirdly, national and international indicators suggest that tourists are increasingly less interested in "showpiece" resorts and destinations and more interested in environmental, cultural, heritage, ethnic and historical features. Cultural tourism is a strategy which is designed to satisfy the requirements of economic development in an industry which now represents 6% of the nation's GDP without sacrificing environmental and cultural quality. The special role of a cultural planning strategy in this context is summarised by Carole Rifkind, of the US organisation, Partners for Livable Places, when she argues that 'basing tourism on the arts, ethnicity, architecture...heritage involves the recovery of cultural resources...we hardly knew we had'. There is a precarious but not impossible equilibrium to be established here between the interests of 'hosts' and 'guests'.

3. Culture, Social and Community Development

In programs targeted to community development, self-reliance and stewardship, cultural resources have a strategic role to play. It is not just the corporate or industrial attractiveness of places which is important but also the quality of life for citizens and residents and these two facets are, of course, closely related. The provision and facilitation of arts and cultural facilities and activities have provided invaluable resources to encourage participation, a sense of identity and place and a general sense of belonging to a dynamic and viable community.

Cultural programs can turn anonymous urban 'spaces' into special places by encouraging strategies for the management and custodianship of community assets and heritage. Such programs can also be directed to encouraging forms of social equity in recognising and maintaining the diversity of cultures and cultural resources in a given community.

Brisbane is an increasingly ethnically diverse city. Overseas-born populations in some Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) are as high as 46%; non-English speaking background (NESB) residents as high as 31%. The Aboriginal and Islander population in Brisbane increased by a massive 71.4% between 1981 and 1986. Brisbane has a population which is multiethnic if not yet multicultural. Cultural planning in this context includes addressing the 'lifestyle' aspects of eating, dress and leisure routines. A cultural development strategy needs to address, service and facilitate diverse cultural needs and to realise the wealth of cultural resources in the overall cultural profile of the city.

4. Building on and developing a Cultural Infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure ranges from museums and galleries through community halls, libraries and cultural centres to the establishment or facilitation of space and opportunities for production, performance and dis-
play and the designation of cultural and heritage ‘precincts’. Such an infrastructure is necessary in order to

* provide the necessary space and opportunity for cultural production

* provide texture and ‘animation’ to city and suburban areas

* offer a distinctive identity and image to the city and hence a sense of stewardship

* enhance the cultural industries and their possibilities of returning economic and social benefits by enlivening key areas of the city and providing a ‘marketplace’ for the producers and consumers of culture.

There are also documented benefits of such initiatives in the areas of retailing and public safety.

In programs of urban design and improvement, cultural skills and values have an obvious role to play in the elaboration of a ‘City Image’ both in terms of perceived attractiveness from outside and in terms of internal texture and quality of life.

Such skills and values can be applied from the largest corporate headquarters to the smallest item of street furniture; from Public Art to the maintenance and adaptive use of heritage buildings and sites; from museum and gallery management to mural design. Such skills are often ill-used or under-used but they are there to be drawn on given the imagination and commitment to a durable and quality City Image. Such a strategy would also provide employment to a significantly under-employed section of the local workforce and prevent the continuing cultural ‘talent drain’ to the southern cities.

Many cities in the world have designated specific areas as cultural precincts as key components of their cultural infrastructure. Washington DC, for example, introduced an ordinance in 1985 "...to develop a concentration of public and private spaces and activities for the arts and artists including fine arts, performing arts and arts-related retail and entertainment uses that provide for local, national and international arts activities'.

This entailed establishing both physical and organisational linkages between existing venues of cultural activity (museums, theatres, etc), the enhancement and integration of heritage buildings and sites, the development of an appropriate open and public space strategy and enhanced supply of rehearsal, performance and arts spaces to benefit both practitioners and the city’s general amenities.

5. Management and Funding Issues

In order to be strategic, it goes without saying that a carefully formulated medium to long-term strategy and policy framework is necessary.

While provision of resources and facilities and direct financial assistance in the form of civic patronage is a key component of government strategies for culture, there has been a shift towards combining such provision with active facilitation of programs and activities. This has entailed local government acting in the roles of advocate, catalyst, researcher, planner and adviser with the aim of fostering forms of community development and self-reliance.

This benefits government and it benefits the community by removing the sense of ‘passivity’ from service provision. Cultural activities are by definition active processes of production and consumption: they get people involved in participation, celebration and an active sense of belonging to or identifying with their community, place, lifestyle, environment and city. Combining ‘provision’ with self-activity, self-reliance, identity and participation is the special domain of a cultural planning strategy. This applies across the board from interactive living history museums to precinct performances and displays to community arts programs.

Partnership possibilities in strategic cultural development as a component of city and regional planning exist in various forms:

* Between the three levels of government

* Between government and community

* Between government and the private sector

* Between the community and the private sector

...and various combinations

In the financing and resourcing of festivals, exhibitions and major cultural events such partnerships already exist in an ad hoc way. More co-ordination and examination of the possibilities are needed, however, particularly in those areas which have regional, state or federal implications. These include (i) community development and social equity objectives; (ii) tourism strategies; (iii) major festivals; (iv) regional cultural initiatives; (v) co-ordinated arts, culture and leisure programs; (vi) cultural industry development.

Strategic cultural development in the context of urban planning requires a unit of management, co-ordination and liaison along with appropriate advisory and consultative bodies—a 'Ministry for the Quality of Life' as Robert McNulty once put it. Those cities and local authorities around the world—including a couple in Australia—which have successfully or even partially embarked on such strategies, have established an administrative unit concerned with cultural affairs and development, with a jurisdiction in management, facilitation, advocacy, research, liaison, program development and policy formation across the range of cultural activities broadly defined.

With a policy framework of this type it is possible to establish cultural planning as an integral component of a general strategy for urban development, simultaneously addressing some of the major issues affecting Australian cities such as urban 'blight', unemployment, local economic development, the demographic depletion of inner city areas, street crime, and access and equity issues for marginalised populations and minorities. Given the imagination, will and resources, of course.

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Phantom of the Theatre

Julie Revallion looks at an example of cultural edifice-building gone wrong.

The bicentennial year brought about a number of federal, state and local government initiatives in the realm of Australian leisure. One of the more permanent outcomes of the bicentennial celebrations in Sydney is the involvement of local councils in art institutions. Some councils funded modest projects such as Fairfield’s revamped School of the Arts. Others, however, embarked on major developments such as the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre at Penrith, the Hills Entertainment Centre at Baulkham Hills, the Campbelltown City Art Gallery and the Parramatta Riverside Theatres.

Considering the traditional absence of any organised local government commitment to the cultural life of their constituencies, the existence of these major cultural centres is remarkable. This article will endeavour to provide a history of the controversial early years of Parramatta Riverside Theatres and the role Parramatta Council played in its first experience in managing a major cultural institution.

Funding for the new cultural centres came from a mix of state, federal and local council sources, with Parramatta Council receiving the bulk of state and federal government support. Once erected, however, the burden of responsibility fell squarely on the shoulders of local government. Local councils such as Parramatta have traditionally provided cultural institutions such as libraries, and have given some in-kind support to local cultural activity, but culture generally remains a low priority within the local government system. Consequently, there exists a total absence of any coherent cultural policy at the local government level. Nevertheless, Parramatta Council, lured by the availability of a hand-out from state and federal governments, decided to take on board long-term management responsibility. For Parramatta Council, the construction, funding and management of the centre has been a huge headache. Inexperienced in managing a leisure facility of this kind, the council members found themselves in the unenviable position of trying to make the arts popular and financially sustainable—something mainstream arts institutions have been unable to do despite their small but converted audience base and ongoing government patronage. Bitter political infighting, poor attendances and hostile community reactions, funding deficits and confusion over programming have all accompanied local council’s involvement in arts institutions.

The Parramatta Bicentennial Cultural Centre, later renamed Parramatta Riverside Theatres, opened its doors on 17 February 1988. The basic design was for a 695 fixed-seat theatre, plus two moveable seat theatres of 200 and 100 seats each. The centre also incorporated a bar and courtyard area. Original cost estimates started at $1 million but escalated by the time of opening to $10.6 million. Parramatta Council provided the land, but the entire construction cost was met by the state and federal governments, with the aid of corporate sponsorship. An independent managing company, Parramatta Bicentennial Cultural Centre Limited, was set up to control the centre, comprised mainly of councillors and representatives from the private sector. Spiralling costs led to an attempt by Parramatta Council to disband the company eight months before the centre even opened, with the aim of managing the centre via a
sub-committee of their finance department. The attempt failed due to a legal technicality, but it indicated Parramatta Council's preoccupation with controlling its financial liability with regard to the complex.

Astonishingly, there was no comprehensive market research undertaken during this period. While the council was busy trying to protect itself from possible financial failure, it was making few attempts to work out how the centre could be a success. There was very little idea of what market the centre would serve and with what product. Not surprisingly, early management found itself in a programming quandary. Lacking extensive audience research, or an inventory of local cultural industries, management succumbed to a type of programming schizophrenia which included drama, classical music, jazz, comedy, late-night cabaret, exhibitions, pop music, opera, business lunches and conferences, art and sculpture exhibitions, street jugglers, cafes and restaurants. Few of these options were potentially profitable.

This dilemma was compounded by the reluctance of any mainstream performing arts companies to leave their safe inner-city nests, and by technical and design constraints which prevented popular forms such as rock concerts from being performed on site. Early productions such as *The Men Who Made Australia* and *The Sentimental Bloke* promised a celebration of early white male culture, but both were box-office failures.

By October 1988, just eight months after the opening of the centre, the general manager was asked to resign amid bitter allegations of mismanagement. The centre was operating with a rumoured deficit of $270,000. The operating company blamed council for inadequate support, the state government for incorrect budget forecasts and cutbacks in funding, and the private sector for insufficient sponsorship contributions. Parramatta Council blamed the management company which had failed in its few brief months to establish a local constituency and generate local support.

Council attempted to install a new management team comprised of a joint venture between Playbill Australia and Michael Edgley International. However, the negotiations fell through as the groups concerned were discouraged by the bad publicity the centre had attracted and the limits on productions imposed by an inflexible design. Parramatta Council was stuck with Riverside and it obviously did not relish the prospect.

On 17 February 1989, the Parramatta Bicentennial Cultural Centre was renamed Parramatta Riverside Theatres. The council was coming to the belated awareness that the centre had to be directed at and positioned within the local market. The idea of a cultural centre was considered too highbrow for the area, and the name change indicated an important change of direction. Productions performed after that time explicitly sought to popularise the high arts, but had limited success. Reg Livermore's Aussie opera *Big Sister* failed to popularise perhaps the most intimidating of all art forms, the opera.

1991 will hopefully be the first year that the complex will operate in the black. Local publicity is more positive and the centre is gradually shaking off the 'white elephant' image. This year will be the first year that a mainstream company will perform on the site and productions of the Sydney and Melbourne Theatre Companies are planned for later this year.

Meanwhile, the cultural life of Parramatta continues to be defined largely by the market. While Riverside struggles to increase attendances, to woo city-based art institutions and make belated connections with local arts groups such as the Western Symphony, most local cultural life continues elsewhere. The three local cinemas, live music venues, Rosehill racetrack, Parramatta Leagues Club and Stadium, shopping centres, the extensive Eisteddfod program, schools and multicultural centres, lounge rooms and street corners continue to provide the sites where meaning and pleasure are generated by the community.

So why did the local council choose to import the cultural forms of the inner city with so little understanding of the dynamics of local cultural life? Firstly, the value of the elite arts, such as watching live theatre, contemplating artworks, and listening to classical music was unquestioned. For the state, federal and local governments involved it seemed appropriate that, during the 200th birthday of European settlement in Australia, the public should start being a bit more sophisticated and civilised. We could be forgiven for asking whether this was a prime example of the continued vitality of Australia's much talked-of cultural cringe? What else could explain the preferential treatment afforded to the erection of arts centres? Any other leisure facility, even if government agreed to fund it, would have been subjected to the most rigorous analysis and needs assessment. The council seemed to believe that the cultural centre would,
by some mysterious and unexplained action, uplift and transform the very consciousness of the people, strengthening community pride and focussing community identity by its very presence.

For the Parramatta Council, in the early stages, a cultural centre located in their very own local government area offered a potentially promising opportunity for them to share in the prestige and exalted status accorded to the arts in this country. This is the major reason why a council such as Parramatta, which had previously displayed little interest in local cultural activity, suddenly decided to accept responsibility for a major cultural institution.

A constant theme within the rhetoric which surrounded the erection of Parramatta Riverside Theatres was the ambiguous notion that the centre or the last hundred years Sydney, in the company of other cities across the world, has attempted to develop some control over the scope and style of urban expansion. Rapid urban growth has undermined successive metropolitan plans. It has placed increasing stress on the fragile environment of the Cumberland Plain west of Sydney. It has also been responsible for a seemingly unending succession of new communities, many of which have been developed without the attendant infrastructure and services to allow for an acceptable standard of community life.

Large estates of both public and private housing have covered what was previously rural land. Existing towns and settlements have been altered in both character and dimension. Making sense of this changing environment continues to be a consuming task for both older communities and new arrivals.

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**Green Fields**


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Much has been written about the level of social and cultural dislocation that has come to be seen as an almost in-
evitable feature of new communities. It could be argued, however, that this depiction of new release areas as 'uncultured' in fact maintains their position as a valued counterpoint to areas (and populations) well serviced by mainstream culture. In her latest book Worse Than Death Jean Bedford's intrepid private detective Anna Southwood travels to Liverpool on a case and observes that "In the fading light it looked like a good place for a murder". This line is just one example of a cultural tradition focused around the 'badlands' of western Sydney. So pervasive is this tradition that even documentary material is often accompanied by the epic lyrics of working class despair and rebellion, encouraging the viewer not to understand but to encompass vicariously these 'suburbs of the heart' as the dark side of his/her own cultural experience.

This depiction of the culture of the new community as a necessary adjunct to mainstream culture has had significant effects on cultural development in new release areas. It has resulted in a deliberately interventionist community arts movement which has energetically attempted to support and develop a positive and indigenous community identity. This work, so successful in its own right, has nevertheless been peripheral to a belief that cultural disadvantage is historical and will be alleviated naturally as the community matures and develops a more successful social infrastructure. Hence, the community arts project itself is often seen as both alleviating cultural disadvantage and as indicating the absence of other more valuable cultural activity. A necessary parallel to this is the belief that cultural maturity is indicated by the presence of mainstream cultural activity and facilities.

Given the heavy demands placed on local government and community welfare organisations in servicing new release areas, it is easy to see how these views support the commonly held idea that the provision of cultural services is 'icing on the cake' to be dealt with when other more pressing issues are resolved. The tenacity with which this stance is defended is in itself a testament to battle for scarce resources that determines such narrow agendas. Hence, it is argued, child care must take precedence over the cultural needs of the child (and her mother). It is also important to recognise that the beliefs themselves are a consequence of a narrow definition of culture that is more heavily reliant on costly infrastructure than any understanding of community cultural values. The idea that the cultural needs of women and children might be met within the context of child care, shopping or even domestic environments is not considered. The idea that 'real' culture is absent from new communities is an extension of these beliefs.

There are, of course, contradictions in this outlook. On one hand there is an almost total lack of acceptance of a cultural landscape inclusive of such forms as domestic environments, auto decoration and shopping expeditions. On the other hand, there is a gradual recognition that some cultural activity, notably community arts, can have other desirable social or even economic outcomes. These can include increased resident involvement in community life, decreased vandalism and movement towards a more positive community identity.

While these outcomes deserve such recognition it is disturbing that they are not defined as cultural phenomena in themselves. Is not the presence or absence of vandalism an indicator of a cultural relationship to the environment? Is no community involvement a consequence of communication mechanisms that are themselves culturally determined? Can not community identity be described as the collective embracing of cultural signs and relationships?

What is needed is an acceptance, now only partially realised, that community development must extend beyond pragmatic concerns with effective service provision. Cultural venues are an important part of cultural service provision. But in new communities facilitating the emergence of a broader cultural landscape with all its potential for a diversity of expression, interaction and local intervention is an equal priority. Cultural planning at a locality level can not only identify the characteristics of the emerging cultural landscape, it can also be a focus for direct negotiation and advocacy with other planning bodies. This can enable an integration of cultural priorities in all aspects of the planning and management of new release areas. Given the complexities of the planning process and the exaggerated timelines necessary for the provision of services and resources, it is unrealistic to expect sensitive cultural planning to be achieved as an afterthought. It is far more likely that neglect will result in the provision of cultural services or facilities that value mainstream cultural development at the expense of a dynamic culture that is intrinsic to the community and its new population. Integrating cultural planning into the wider local planning framework allows for both the recognition and support of developing cultural identity.

Cultural identity is a fundamental expression of our sense of belonging. It determines how we see ourselves and how we relate to the world beyond. We pay a high price for overlooking its centrality in contemporary urban life. Cultural inequity in new urban developments is a cause for concern to both communities and service providers. By planning cultural futures in the early stages of land release much of this stress can be alleviated.

Glenmore Park is a new residential release area of approximately 800 hectares three kilometres south of the Penrith City Centre, west of Sydney. It will be one of the largest urban releases in western Sydney with an anticipated population of 20,000 when the development is complete.

Both the developers—a consortium comprising Elders Finance and the NSW Department of Housing—and Penrith Council have been anxious to avoid the backlog in the provision of community services and facilities that has been a much publicised feature of new communities. The development of a community plan has been funded by the developers and managed by Penrith Council. The community plan is paralleled by a management plan, a structure plan and an open space plan, and stands in relationship to a local environment plan and detailed development control plans. The cultural plan will form a section of the Glenmore Park Community
Plan. It is also intended as a point of reference for specific sections of the open space plan. The cultural plan was funded by the developers.

Given the comprehensive planning strategies that have accompanied the development of Glenmore Park it is important to note that the cultural plan is a latecomer to the party. The cultural planning consultancy was the outcome of a proposal put to the developers by local workers. Its effectiveness has been dependent on two things: the commitment of the developers to provide funds and support, and the willingness of Penrith Council to integrate the plan into already existing planning processes so late in the day.

The developers and council seem to have supported the plan for several reasons. Penrith Council has been quick to recognise the potential links between community and cultural development objectives—in particular the development of a sense of community identity. They have also recognised the part that cultural activity and facilities might play in enhancing the amenity of the built and natural environment. The developers, while supporting these directions, are undoubtedly attracted by the increased market appeal offered by the promise of a planned cultural environment.

It could be argued that the acceptance of cultural planning has been a process of negotiation, of 'selling' the philosophies and strategies to different players in the planning process rather than merely developing appropriate strategies for an already approved agenda. It can’t be denied that opening new arenas for planning cultural outcomes is exciting, but a dependence on individual values and attitudes for an acceptance of cultural agendas is dangerous. What has worked in Glenmore Park might not be accepted by other developers or local governments. Given the complexity of urban planning, the breadth of issues and agencies involved and the inevitable scarce resources at all levels of planning and implementation, there is an emphatic need to position cultural planning firmly within the broader framework at both local and state government level.

Glenmore Park’s preliminary cultural plan attempts to establish strategic directions for ongoing cultural planning in Glenmore Park and its environs. It quite deliberately eschews narrow definitions of ‘culture’ in favour of an understanding of a ‘cultural landscape’ which is both inclusive and diverse. Such a ‘landscape’ would include participation in mainstream cultural activity such as theatre attendance, dancing classes and art exhibitions, but it would also affirm the importance of domestic environments, pub culture, graffiti, personal histories and other cultural forms as signifiers of a developing cultural identity. Moreover, it would contest the pervasive view that culture can only be ‘provided’ by outsiders and encourage a recognition that even the newest communities are capable of an energetic accumulation and trade in cultural values, skills, traditions and commodities.

The plan itself is grouped around five key areas: a projected demographic profile; the built and natural environment; existing cultural services and facilities in Penrith local government area; community services and facilities; and funding and sponsorship options.

The first two of these areas have been developed in close consultation with the community plan and the open space plan. In the first instance the cultural plan makes as realistic an appraisal as possible of the cultural needs of the projected demographic breakdown of the area and makes a series of recommendations as to how these might be accommodated. For example, the presence of a large population of children under 12 not only increases the demand for cultural activity for that age group, it also places stress on the cultural needs of women. This necessitates not only the planning of activities and facilities but also the development of an infrastructure which allows women access to cultural activity—including flexible child care, safe transport, accessible local facilities and an understanding of the shopping complex as a venue for cultural exchange. In a similar way the plan also evaluates the needs of youth, residents from non-English speaking backgrounds, and the Aboriginal community. The intention is not to be prescriptive about cultural outcomes but rather to encourage an intelligent appraisal of needs that can be reassessed as the community grows.

The focus on the built and natural environment makes some detailed proposals for early resident involvement in the design of local environments. It aims to encourage cultural input into early landscaping work, and to provide an opportunity for residents to develop skills in planning and managing local environments at a time when collaboration between the community and design professionals might have maximum effect.

The plan also discusses the broader cultural environment of Penrith and its interrelationship with Glenmore Park. Two significant issues are raised here. There is a fundamental question of access, of how easily the new community will be able to participate in an existing cultural infrastructure. Equally important is the dilemma of how cultural service providers can adequately address the needs of a local government area that has doubled in size in the last twenty years without additional support.

The ability of the community development sector to support cultural planning objectives is equally dependent on their ability to take on new agendas. In recognition of this the plan also emphasises the need for appropriate skills development and resourcing of community service providers to facilitate their support of and involvement in cultural activity. Again it must be stressed that the success of the cultural planning process will be dependent on a developing sense of ownership by all players. This will depend on an appreciation of collaborative work, creative partnerships and the possibility of mutually beneficial outcomes. But it will be achieved through implementation processes which are sensitive to the demands that new release areas place on both workers and residents alike.

MARLA GUPPY is an arts development worker from Western Sydney.
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Until recently, Labor looked dead and buried all around the country. The conservative decade seemed at hand. The remarkable NSW election result in May, though, offered a glimmer of hope. ALR’s team of commentators ponders the result.

For Rodney Cavalier, the NSW election result demonstrates the dramatic social changes of the last few decades. Labor, he argues, has to catch up or be caught out.

Immediately prior to the announcement of the NSW election in May, the conventional wisdom was a landslide win for the Greiner government: the Labor Party across Australia was said to be in such terrible odour that the NSW opposition under Bob Carr would be victims—innocent or otherwise. For much of the term of the Greiner government, a conventional wisdom was the certainty of a first-term government gaining a virtually automatic second term. When all of this went horribly awry under the unanswerable truth of the ballot box, not a commentator was prepared.
Rather than analyse the root causes for the rejection of Greinerism, commentators took refuge in a new convention: the notion that there is a tide abroad against incumbents. Like the earlier postulates, it is balderdash. The first law of electoral politics was what counted: governments lose, oppositions do not win. With that in mind, a dissection of the fallacies of the now discredited wisdoms provide a fair degree of the explanation for the resurgence of New South Wales Labor.

Firstly, the dimensions of the Labor defeat in 1988 created a mindset in the Labor Opposition qualitatively different to their previous defeat in 1965. Truly routed, no one believed that Labor was a government in temporary exile. Labor saved itself an entire term by coming to grips with its defeat within days. Secondly, Labor did not have to sort out who was going to lead it. Once it was clear what seats the party had lost, there was only one possible leader and the Greiner government did not ever face an opposition beset with public divisions.

In 1988, Greiner was little more than a beneficiary of a forfeit for which every member of the defeated government, not just its leader, remains responsible. Having entered the Premier’s office, Greiner did not ever enter the affections of the electorate. Rather, he preferred to believe that he was reinventing the culture of NSW politics.

Greiner undertook a sustained exercise in hubris when he hawked his victory in 1988 as a model for conservatives everywhere. At the heart of his rhetoric was the deification of management. At times it appeared that ‘good’ management was taking the place of politics and government. In and of itself, however, management means nothing. An instrument of government is worthwhile only if it delivers goods and services to its consumers efficiently. What goods and services, delivered where, in what quantities—all these remain matters of politics and politicians.

When voters suffered pain as priorities altered to reflect new political imperatives, it did not matter one whit that
the destruction of cherished services were textbook ex-
amples of paper-shuffling through chains of command. It
did not matter that a raft of economists said that this was
the ‘correct’ thing to be doing. What did matter was that
the pain, being real, remained real. The substance was
wrong, not the marketing. In the few weeks of the cam-
paign, Bob Carr used his tongue to bring the memories of
that pain to the forefront of voters’ considerations. It was
all very basic stuff, though ignored by the media, that
sealed the return of pre-1988 Labor voters. Greiner gave
former Labor voters reasons to drop his government, Carr
provided them with reasons to return to the Labor fold.

Examined closely, the pain exacted was rather selective.
Decisions announced to a chorus of approval by the leader
writers and conservative columnists had a curious habit of
altering on their way to the coalface. Notorious rorts in
the provision of free transport for school children, for example,
were as untouchable for the Coalition as they were for their
Labor predecessors. User-pays was supposed to be a guid-
ing principle: it did not apply to water usage once the
Greiner government assessed the impact on the voters of
increases in household water rates. Some decisions ap-
peared gimmick-driven: one year the government comp-
pelled the electricity distribution authorities to dissolve
asset reserves so that the government might send rebate
cheques to consumers and then, the following year, the
authorities had to increase charges and enter heavy bor-
rowings.

For all of the cutbacks of basic services—especially in
country towns—the voters discovered that the vaunted
reductions in outlays and debt did not translate into
reduced taxes and charges. Quite the contrary. Households
had to find extra money in a time of recession for registra-
tion of motor vehicles, water rates, petrol, electricity, fares
and licences. Voters were not impressed with privatisation
or corporatisation of and for itself. In the railways, high-
priced executives and consultants could only reduce
operating expenditure by cutting staff and services—and
then presented it as a novel departure in transport economics.
(The same geniuses left out of their calculations the social utility of the railways—matters like the savings
in motor vehicle third-party, fuel and fuel emissions, time
lost in traffic jams, motor accidents, workers compensa-
tion.) Under Greinerism, a deficit is, by ideological disposi-
tion, a boot word: investment in public works or the social
welfare aspect of public utilities is noted solely for the
outlay in the current fiscal year, never the potential returns
in future years. When you are paying more for everything
the government might still provide, it was somewhat dif-
ficult to discern exactly where the approval for the govern-
ment was that the commentators liked to claim.

The actual performances of the new management was, on
examination, not even adequate. In the education portfolio,
for example, they attained a level of farce. On the first day
of the Greiner government, the Director-General designate
of Education warranted dismissal without so much as an
audience. TAFE came in for wholesale demolition: the
government sacked that department’s respected head and
replaced him with a businessman who knew nothing of
education or training. Talented people departed the ranks
of TAFE or kept a low profile. In desperation, the govern-
ment had to turn to the aforesaid director-general, the same
man that they had sacked, to retrieve the situation. The
Ministry of Education, after vast expenditures on outside
consultants, moved from a presumptive pre-eminence to
imminent abolition. It was difficult to see much that was
efficient in the management of these human resources.

Carr knew that resentment was there for the tapping and
he tapped it. None of this was novel. The hollowness of the
reporting of the election campaign was the presumption
that the Greiner message on management was either
relevant or appropriate.

NSW had its closest contest in 15 years but the media failed
to report it. When an election campaign receives notices
that it is ‘boring’ or ‘uneventful’, they are a signal solely of
the inadequacy of the reporting tools at the disposal of the
reporters. This refrain makes its appearance in any cam-
paign when there is an absence of pyrotechnics on the trails
of the respective leaders; when voters are contemplative
rather than demonstrative, preferring to keep their inten-
tions under wraps until they enter the polling booth; and
when there is an absence of events or stunts that provide
pictures or noise for cameras and microphones to point at.
What was at play transcended single-purpose explana-
tions.

In the 25 years since Labor lost office in 1965—government
having changed twice since—the electoral landscape of
NSW has transformed itself. It is the same story across
Australia. In a system based on single-member electorate
shifts in individual wealth—even the perception of well-
being and status—can and will transform a suburb, a town,
an electorate in a remarkably short period of time. For those
lost in their own mythology, the problem for Labor in the
Hawke-Keating era has been the rejection of Labor by its
‘traditional base’. Those who peddle such nonsense do so
because it is more palatable than the truth—the base has
disappeared. It disappeared forever some time between
1945 and the 1970s.

The notions of this base revolve around images of a ‘Labor
Movement’, stranded permanently in the 19th century, a
reverie of industrial workers, their spouses and families
marching as one with the branches of the Labor Party. For
its adherents, theologians all, the structure of the Labor
Party does not change, cannot change, must not change.
The phantasm requires an ahistorical understanding of the
circumstances of the party’s birth: the founders of the
Labor Party deliberately created a party that was based
on Labor Leagues of the towns and suburbs, open to all Labor
supporters, who would manage their own affairs through
a self-governing federation of leagues. It was not until
1916, in the midst of Conscription, that the present
debauced structure came into effect. The most enduring
feature of the Conscription tragedy for Australian Labor
was the forfeiture of the control of the party’s destiny by
the party membership.

In the past 75 years, society has changed beyond recogni-
tion, and so has the structure of the workforce. In this
ten voters cannot—
repeat cannot—belong to unions affiliated to the ALP. A majority of workers do not belong to unions; a majority of unionists cannot belong to ALP-affiliated unions; a majority of Labor voters are neither industrial workers nor unionists. Labor voters vote Labor not because of tradition. They certainly do not vote Labor because their union is affiliated to the ALP—a party with such an electoral base would be smaller than the Democrats.

Labor voters vote Labor because the Labor Party offers policies that appeal to their material self-interests or transcendent values (or both). 'Traditional' loyalties matter only for as long as Labor governments do not offend the perceptions of 'traditional' Labor voters and for as long as nothing has altered the perceptions of material circumstance or values of those voters. In 1991 Labor reversed its worst losses because the reality of Greinerism hurt former Labor voters most of all. Bob Carr has been busy saying thanks to those who came back; he knows how impermanent voter loyalties now are.

The Labor Party will survive into the next century only if its structure changes to match the changes in its policies and internal culture. Already, at branch level, the Labor Party has died in much of NSW. Contrary to simplistic notions of a widespread disillusionment with Hawke government policies, the attrition rate of new members of the party has been a constant down the postwar decades: about half of new members do not renew within three years, about 70 per cent within five years. New members leave because the ALP does not fulfil the hopes that they had for it. In the 1980s new members failed to provide replacements for the non-renewals.

People join a party like the ALP, one that is in serious competition for state power, because they are wanting to have a say in the exercise of that power. The ailments of modern Labor do not come down to communication, that is a convenient pretence for those in power. The ailment is fundamental: the members of the ALP do not control their own party. At some point of time new members apprehend that unhappy truth and wonder why they are bothering.

Technology will not be a substitute for a declining membership—nor will party identification on ballot papers, nor public funding. The processes of party decline will continue unless the ALP re-enters the affairs of the community. For that it will need a wholly different governance at the top. Across the world, notably in the former eastern bloc, the trend is toward empowerment of the individual. Labour parties will follow that trend by handing control to their own members or Labour parties will perish. For an increasing number of people who are interested in political action there are attractive alternatives to party membership; for an increasing number interested in social change, politics does not provide the answer. Potential members of the ALP in the future are even less likely to long endure a party whose destiny is in outside hands.

RODNEY CAVALIER was a minister in the 1976-88 Labor government in NSW.
Mark Latham argues that the NSW result marks the birth of a new gameplan for governments in Australia.

There is something special about a political party which dedicates itself to a cause even when defeat seems inevitable. In New South Wales between March and May there was no logical reason for Labor to campaign doggedly. Unemployment was pushing towards 10%, interventionism of various kinds in Victoria and Western Australia had been exposed as bankrupt, Laurie Connell was taking the witness stand in Perth, while NSW Premier Nick Greiner was bolting ahead in every poll and planning his early election.

Yet, by 25 May the ALP had won ten seats and come within two seats of forming a government. The NSW result says something about a new style of politics in Australia and the ALP's agenda in each of the states.

The strong surge to Labor confirmed how public support for all governments is soft and mobile. In all the research, according to every pollster, there has emerged a huge dealignment of the electorate. As many as 40% of Australian voters no longer perceive themselves as strongly supporting a political party. With dealignment has come scepticism about the political process, especially for politicians who serve themselves ahead of the public.

In this sense, politicians are being judged on their style and language as much as the net merit of their policies and achievements. In just three weeks of campaigning Greiner threw away three years of credibility forged the hard way from structural reform. For campaign professionals this should be a frightening experience—understanding how the electorate, almost overnight, can return a politician to year zero. The public mood is able to swing freely between punishment and begrudging respect.

Throughout May, having lost the advantage of hands-on government, Nick Greiner revealed the essential flaw of his personality. On television each night, voters were exposed to a man who—by nature and background—is simply unable to relate to other people. In the current climate, politicians with aloofness and insensitivity woven into their character are better suited to jobs in merchant banking.

Another feature of the election result was the localisation of issues. As in the 1988 NSW elections, where Labor was decimated, party swings fluctuated widely across regions and suburbs—again demonstrating the importance of local politics and campaigns. The ALP's great achievement was the return of its electoral base in the heartland seats of the Hunter, Illawarra and Western Sydney.

Celebrating the centenary of the Balmain branch of the ALP on April 4, former Premier Neville Wran said, "passion is the word that should govern the Labor Party—passion to do things, to give all people a fair go". Throughout May, in many respects, the ALP regained that passion in NSW. Labor leader Bob Carr targeted issues of concern to working families. A campaign focused on government waste, regressive taxes and charges, declining educational opportunities and asset sales took hold in Labor's traditional seats.

Equity was at the heart of the ALP's message—the feeling that Greiner led an arrogant and uncaring government which had done nothing to assist the less privileged. The NSW campaign is proof of how the ALP is most effective among its constituency when it believes in causes and demonstrates passion.

By contrast, Greiner has tried to make a virtue of abandoning ideology and appealing to the middle class with a clinical style of management. There is evidence to show that this strategy was more successful than it appeared on election night. Preliminary figures suggest a polarisation of the electorate, with the ALP doing well in certain types of seats and the Liberal and National Parties scoring swings in others.

Essentially, Labor succeeded in winning back voters who in 1988, for the first time in their lives, had voted non-Labor. Nearly all the electorates won by the ALP were in areas which historically the party has dominated—Wollongong, Newcastle, Swansea, Cessnock, Port Jackson (covering Balmain), Penrith, Broken Hill and Bathurst. Conversely, the
### The Old Rules of Australian Politics

1. Politics is about how we share the benefits of economic growth between competing groups.
2. People vote through a combination of their class position and the influence of their parents.
3. Election campaigns can only marginally change public opinion. People have aligned themselves to parties during the term of government.
4. Over time people forget and forgive the mistakes of politicians.
5. Politicians should never admit to bad policy or errors of judgment.
6. Parties win elections by building a coalition of support among key interest groups.
7. Oppositions should take every opportunity to oppose and criticise the government and its policies.
8. Politicians should avoid policies which could lead to controversy and upset important supporters.
9. All new taxes and tax increases will be unpopular.
10. Bashing other levels of government is a sure vote winner.

### The New Rules of Australian Politics

1. Politics is about making the economic cake bigger and using scarce resources more efficiently.
2. Voting patterns are exceptionally fluid, especially since the rise of independents and localisation of issues.
3. The electorate's suspicion of politics means that election campaigns can produce substantial movements in public opinion.
4. Politicians who lose credibility can never fully regain it. Rejuvenated support is likely to be soft and temporary.
5. The public appreciates frank views and reasonable admissions of error from their politicians.
6. Policies designed only to please interest groups will be judged as superficial, upsetting broader interests in the community and often not even winning the support of their target audience.
7. Oppositions are expected to contribute to the substance of public debate. The quality rather than quantity of their statements is all important.
8. During economic decline politicians need to make the hard decisions necessary for national recovery, even if it means offending certain interests in the short term.
9. People will support new taxes when they can see a direct return—for instance, the NSW petrol levy is popular because it is returned to road funding (the formal term is fiscal equivalence).
10. Politicians should get their own government in order before worrying about politics elsewhere.

Marginal seats where the Greiner government improved its vote came in areas where the political contest has been fluid. Winning back this middle ground is now the leading electoral task of Labor. In this, the party must push itself ahead of the changing trends in Australian politics.

Political science has always held that a nation's politics is derived from its economic position and cultural values. Growing economies can afford the luxury of sectional interest politics where interest groups jostle for a greater share of national resources. The problems of a contracting economy, however, change the nature of the political debate. Politicians and opinion leaders are more inclined to stress the need for consensus and co-operation, working together in the national interest.

Through the long boom of the 50s and 60s in Australia, economic management was barely an issue. It was simply a question of fine-tuning the economy to maintain high employment and low inflation. Through the 70s and 80s, as Australia's position in world markets weakened, the economy came to the centre of public life. Now, during recession, economic management is virtually the only issue—or, at least, the issue from which all others stem.

The advent of dealignment and localisation in Australian politics arises from the economic debate. The inability of both major parties to deliver their promises for economic recovery has lowered public confidence in the political process. This frustration has turned the focus away from party politics and towards those local issues and candidates with which people have a stronger feeling of input and control.

The evidence of the last two federal elections confirms how Australia's economic problems have led to new electoral perceptions. In 1987 and 1990 voters in key seats supported the Hawke government's program of short-term pain to realise long-term national benefits. That is, there was an appreciation of how Australia must increase the size of the national cake before debating how to cut it.

Most Australian politicians are still struggling with these new priorities. Those educated in the politics of the long boom have been slow to adapt to the declining relevance of sectional interests. At all levels of the ALP it is still possible to find the romantic notion that government comes automatically from building a coalition of support among trade unionists, welfare recipients, ethnic minorities and environmentalists.

Nations facing economic decline cannot move fast enough to rejuvenate and restructure their economies. The longer politicians avoid reform, the greater the decline in produc-
tivity and competitive advantage. Delay and doubt only allows sectional interests, seeking to preserve their privileges, time to campaign against change. The most successful politicians and parties are those with the mobility to adapt to new economic circumstances and advocate new policies.

The flexibility of the ALP is shackled in two significant ways: the party’s institutional ties to the trade union movement and its feudal system of factionalism. Any structure motivated by self-interest and which functions through authority and patronage is bound to be resistant to change.

These issues threaten the foundations of the ALP. The party was formed by the trade union movement at a time when Australia had arguably the highest standard of living in the world. The role of political Labor was to pass laws protecting the share of national resources available to workers. This was the defensive nature of labourism—a sectional movement obsessed with welfare payments and industrial laws.

The great achievement of the Hawke government has been to modernise the ALP’s approach to economic management. The party’s relevance has been maintained when logically Labor could have slipped into partisanship and sectionalism. The achievement itself—while not showing up in any reports or statistics—comes from keeping alive an old labour-based party in a nation with weak productivity and a Third World pattern of trade.

The evidence around the states, however, is not as encouraging. State branches of the ALP are more influenced by factionalism and union demands than the federal party. This has produced Labor governments less inclined towards public sector reform and policy innovation. In some cases, sloppy interventionism emerged as a substitute for structural change. The ALP needs to understand how, throughout the world, parties of the Left have failed whenever they limited their role to assisting people as workers instead of consumers.

Given the weaknesses of the Australian economy, no government can avoid the discipline of doing better with less. The challenge for the ALP at state level is to use public resources both more productively and in the interests of equity. This means a policy mix of public sector reform, industry competition and the redistribution of resources to areas of greatest need. The party cannot afford to lose sight of its twin goals of equity and efficiency.

The culture of state politics often restricts opportunities for reform. Events tend to be dominated by the daily news agenda. The work of opposition parties often focuses on exploiting the hard luck stories of people mistreated by large state bureaucracies. Policy analysis and structural changes to government are shuffled down the list of priorities.

In these ways parties fall captive to interest groups and opinion polls. In government they lack clear philosophical directions and continue to prop up sectional interests. For the ALP this process is doubly dangerous.

Ultimately, vested interests—whether organised through business, trade unions or on single issues—can only be satisfied through the creation of privileges in public policy. The wealthy and powerful benefit most. In any economy, privilege is funded at the expense of those people who cannot organise themselves politically. Poor and isolated families suffer most.

In every state there are sections of the public sector sheltered from reform. In NSW the Greiner government has done nothing to lift productivity or reform work practices in local government or police administration. Equally, the power of the doctors and lawyers has prevented the major parties from introducing cost recovery from private professions on their use of public-funded facilities.

In every state there are industries sheltered from competition. Domestic rivalry is the major stimulant by which firms improve and innovate. Yet Australian industries, in both the public and private sectors, have one of the highest ownership concentrations in the western world. At the state level the ALP has an opportunity to urge greater competition within intrastate airline, bus transport, liquor retailing and land conveyancing services. With competition, of course, come enhanced consumer outcomes.

Economic circumstances have made much harder the ALP’s task of supplying capital services, such as schools and hospitals, to areas of greater need. It is much easier to fund new services from growth in government revenue than to take on the politics of redistribution.

Health services in NSW are an outstanding example of this process. Western Sydney has one-third fewer hospital beds per thousand of population than the state average and 30% less funding per capita than the rest of Sydney. That is, the region with Sydney’s worst personal health record receive the smallest share of public health resources. Yet the state’s politicians have failed to advocate the closure of inner-city hospitals and transfer of specialist services to Sydney’s west. Fear of publicly confronting the medical professions has overwhelmed the interests of equity.

The redistribution of resources will continue to test Labor through the 90s. Any disappointment among Labor’s constituency about structural changes to the economy and public sector reforms—an essential part of the party’s broader appeal—needs to be balanced by a renewed commitment to equity causes. The party needs to find for its traditional supporters the sense of movement and passion which comes from campaigning on issues of fairness.

That, ultimately, is the real lesson from NSW—how heartland support, once lost, can then be regained. Pundits predicting the decline of Labor would not be so confident if they understood how big swings out can turn into big swings back.

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T he recent NSW state election result was one which was not scripted, as Premier Nick Greiner put it in his brief and chastened appearance on the election night of May 25. It is clear though that most people whose vote turned against the Liberals (or against rightwing local independents) had a reason, such as the closure of schools and hospitals in their area, the loss of public transport services, deterioration of public services, or increases in taxes and charges, such as motor registration. The serious miscalculation by the Liberals in NSW was their belief that people would put aside these privations, instead respecting Greiner as a ‘strong’ leader, willing to make the ‘tough’ decisions for the greater economic good. Nick Greiner did not coin the phrase ‘NSW Inc’, but it was one which he was happy to accept, seeing governing a state as akin to running an enterprise, and believing most voters felt likewise.

Greiner is a firm believer in what is known as the ‘public choice’ theory of the state. ‘Public choice’ theory has its origins in neo-classical economic theory and in the work of the conservative ‘Virginia School’ of political economists. Put simply, this school of thought sees a conflict between ‘rational’ economic management and the electoral process, where party competition, majority voting and input politics are seen as leading to ‘distorted’ or ‘irresponsible’ public policy outcomes. In particular, it is argued that particular interest groups, as well as voters in marginal electorates, engage in ‘political exchange’ with politicians and political parties, extracting major policy concessions in exchange for electoral support.

The obvious conclusion is that ‘good government’ involves spurning the special interest groups, taking away their privileges, and toughing out the consequences. The political payoff arises in the claim that, after the original protest and bluster, the disenfranchised majority of ‘average’ citizens (and taxpayers) will respect the government’s capacity to make ‘tough’ decisions. This sort of political analysis, which has influenced the Labor government federally (especially in the period when Peter Walsh was Finance Minister) and the Liberals both in NSW and nationally, appeared to have been vindicated with the lack of protest against the Greiner government over the last 18 months, and it was widely assumed that the NSW election would mark its consummation as accepted political wisdom.

Voting trends in NSW have revealed Greiner’s miscalculation. To take the most obvious example, the Liberals’ changes to secondary education, rather than being seen as an attack on the ‘education lobby’ (which is large, vocal and anti-Liberal), were perceived as an attack on universal education and the creation of a two-tier system. As such, they became an issue of concern to every parent. Greiner’s dismissal of large protests held at the time, where he claimed they were both insignificant (because more people went to the football) and a plot of the ‘Sussex Street mafia’, was smug and foolish.

‘Public choice’ theory functions as both political analysis and a pub philosophy. Its links to the political-economic agenda of ‘economic rationalism’ are obvious. The rejection of such a politics of austerity by NSW voters must be of great concern, partly to Labor federally, but particularly to the Liberals who need to win seats in NSW to gain power federally. It had, until now, been assumed in most influential circles that Australian voters had come to accept a lowering of expectations from the state, in the name of economic necessity, and that the performance of governments would be assessed by voters on the basis of their ability to make ‘tough’ decisions. The ongoing crisis of the Kirner Labor government only seemed to bear this out.

Economic rationalism dominated the political scene in Australia for much of the 1980s. It possessed internal
coherence, it had powerful advocates, and it had seemed the only logical position in the current economic climate. The only alternative seemed to be a sort of anti-economic rationalism, or economic irrationalism, which called for more funding for existing programs, was opposed to structural reforms, and believed the tax take could be expanded indefinitely to pay for such promises. This agenda, often not clearly argued but often thought, may have made sense in individual cases but lacked coherence at the 'macro' level, and thus its advocates looked foolish against the economic 'drys'.

Although it appears from this world-view that free markets are the basic precondition of democracy, economic rationalism ultimately has a problem with democratic processes. This arises from the tendency of voters to make the 'wrong' choices, in the sense that they put their particular interests ahead of what is considered to be the 'general' interest. Such a conclusion is an uncomfortable one to reach for those who stress individualism and the pursuit of self-interest as the cornerstones of democracy. As a result, some have sought to explain the unexpectedly close election result as an act of spite and as a mistake on the part of NSW voters, rather than as a more-or-less rational response to unpopular policies. In the end, such a point of view demands that economic and other decisions be taken out of the public arena altogether lest they be unpopular, as illustrated by federal Liberal leader John Hewson's calls for a Reserve Bank 'independent' of parliament.

The NSW election may herald the first expression at the polls of the widely-held view that political parties and policy-making elites have lost touch with both their supporters and the citizenry generally, and that democratic processes can still be called upon to make them accountable when it matters most.

Nick Greiner has been saying otherwise, stressing that his second-term policy agenda remains unaltered. But he will have to deal with an articulate and critical group of independents, a Labor opposition with renewed confidence, and an increasingly jittery backbench of his own Coalition parties. At any rate, the NSW election result marks a return of the impure world of politics to trouble the otherwise clear horizons of economic rationalism.

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Two Up, Two Down

Tony Aspromourgos argues that the NSW result heralds a return to the community for political parties.

A number of explanations have been offered for the extraordinary NSW election result: Labor leader Bob Carr's scare campaign on the possibility of a state consumption tax; Liberal Party machine ineptitude and/or an ill-conceived election strategy; Labor Party machine skill and/or a brilliantly conceived election strategy; an electorate reeling back from the impact of 'Greinerism' (identified with 'micro-economic reform' and 'economic rationalism' by the economic commentators); and an exaggerated protest vote induced by near-unanimous pre-election opinion that the conservatives would win easily.
There is no monocausal explanation—all these played some part.

I doubt that the consumption tax scare had much impact. Federal Labor has an opportunistic reason for latching on to this element of the Carr campaign: it is the most obvious element they can translate to the national arena, using the boost from Premier Greiner's failure for an offensive against the federal conservatives. For fairly obvious political, economic and constitutional reasons, the consumption tax will be a more potent issue at the federal level.

The conservative election campaign was not merely inept: it was an expensive three-week continuous-play advertisement for just the complacency and arrogance of which Carr was accusing Greiner. Also, Greiner failed to present a program of vision for the future. In truth, this is not because he didn't have one—rather, because he couldn't bring himself to tell the electorate what he had in mind for it.

The first term conservative strategy was to have been two years of austerity, then two years for the electorate to forget, with some ‘fiscal dividend’ back to electors for the government to be returned. It didn’t quite work out this way. The recession put an end to any vote-buying dividend and implied more austerity to come after the early election. A lot of electors must have realised they were in for the same two years down/two years up ride as last time. Carr's linkage of the true state budget deficit (see Michael Gill in ALR 129) to prospects of a ‘horror budget’ was valid and must have struck a chord with many (not least, public servants).

The Labor strategy of attacking Greiner on economic management—evidently his strongest suit—was audacious; but in truth Carr and Labor had no effective alternative. Economic management is so central to contemporary Australian politics that Labor could not succeed without challenging Greiner's credentials. It succeeded. The deficit debate was the window of opportunity into that success.

However, the deeper lesson of the Labor-plus independents majority at this election lies elsewhere: a broad-based multidimensional set of substantive policies addressed to a range of concrete community interests provided the basis for a coalition of voters which brought Labor tantalisingly close to a majority of seats. (If there was a dominant single theme animating this collection of policies it was the socio-economic position of families.)

This approach—along with the phenomenon of independents in parliament—points to the crucial importance of labour movement politics re-establishing broad-based structures with roots in ‘really existing’ communities. For the Labor Party this should add a new urgency to the debates around Bob Hogg's and other proposals for rebuilding a broad and more representative rank-and-file base for the ALP.

Mr Carr may have been drawing a similar lesson in his triumphant return to the Hunter region on the Tuesday following the election, when he thanked the electors of the heartland for returning to “their” centenarian party. In that moment of awareness and euphoria Carr warned the new ALP parliamentarians of the Hunter never to turn their backs on the interests of their local communities, and to represent vigorously those interests to party and government.

That message goes to the heart of the real meaning of this result. The intellectual and political challenge for the labour movement aspiring to govern is to marry community-based programs with overall policy coherence in an age of economic austerity which is far from being over. This is a discipline never required of independents and minor parties.

At the national level the lesson therefore would seem to be that to save itself from destruction Labor must reassert community-based policies of which Brian Howe's program of policy initiatives in the federal arena provides a solid example. This would re-establish some faith with the traditional constituencies; and, in strategic terms, it would more clearly and substantially differentiate Labor from the conservatives, possibly leaving them stranded out on a very rightwing limb.

Such a program and strategy, even if married to macro-economic coherence and credibility, has only a slim possibility of saving federal Labor; but, short of this, it could well position Labor with a base in opposition to reclaim government quickly.

Given the monumental intellectual and political task implied by this, it seems strange, to put it mildly, that by far the ALP's most able politician was (at the time of writing) domiciled in the second back row of the House of Representatives, while a crippled PM staggers on towards what is likely to be a staggering defeat.

TONY ASPROMOURGOS is a visiting fellow in economics at the University of NSW.
It's not just the Left, or Labor, or politicians, which are on the nose. Politics itself is in disrepute. Peter Beilharz mounts a spirited defence of the political.

Lost, awash in the heaving oceans, they see from afar what looks like a mirage, the ship which will save them. It approaches, their hopes escalate; it is real. It comes closer yet, and they clamour to board it. But its captain is a corpse, dressed in a red cap, and the ship sails on and by, without regard for their plight. It is the ship of death. The story line is Edgar Allan Poe’s, but William Morris and Ernest Belford Bax chose to use it to open their century-old work, Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome. The ship of death, for socialists, they say, represents capitalist civilisation. It cannot, will not save us. A striking image, if one that is singularly devoid of practical advice. Who knows, it may be better to ride on the ship of death than to sink without trace at sea; but these are garden-variety facts which revolutionaries typically see fit to ignore.

Revolutionaries have never been much concerned with politics, notwithstanding the overly politicised personas which they all too frequently strike up. Saint-Simon imagined the future society as stateless: a legacy which marxism, with characteristic misfortune, carelessly managed to embrace. Marx took on this view, in essence: politics was to do with class societies, therefore the end of class societies would also mean the end of politics. Of course, there are ambivalences in Marx’s views of politics; like Morris, he also implied (in The Civil War in France) that politics would continue, but in a new form: not in the bourgeois talking-shop called parliament but in proletarian councils. Morris, whose disdain for bourgeois politics probably equalled Marx’s, wrote only half-humorously in News from Nowhere that in the socialist society of the future the Houses of
But now there's more; a sense, which some enthusiasts would call postmodern, that politics is dead because it is modern, constructed by grand and obsolete metanarratives of reform (Left) or consolidation (Right). The certainties, such as they were, seem to have evaporated. Labor governments can no longer be predicted to follow certain historically claimed patterns; indeed, in some cases they cannot even be expected to conduct the affairs of state with a modicum of ordinary competence. They have neither the policies nor the capacities to enact them, while the opposition has few apparent capacities and a few more wild ideas to which they cling in order to appear different.

Is this all there is? It's difficult to say. Some senior figures in the Victorian labour movement expect the ALP to spend at least 20 years in the desert, though the recent behaviour of Mr Kennett may serve to take a few years off that sentence. On the other hand, the uncertainties go either way, as the results of the NSW election suggest. Socialism may be rather largely discredited, but capitalism, now alone on the stage of world history, is tripping up with unsurprising regularity. The gloss has worn off capitalism for at least half of Germany, and the attraction of the Liberal Party is already somewhat tarnished around large parts of New South Wales.

At the same time, it does seem reasonably clear that the ALP, if not itself a ship of death, is at least without purpose, without direction. When the wailing comes to such matters as the balance of payments, we are treated to the same, passive, decade-old observations that industry needs to be restructured. Everybody knows this, and everybody knows it isn't happening. Thus the widely shared sense of impotence and melancholy, and the reinforced sense that politics sucks. The reform process keeps going wrong, even when it's tried; this seems to be one moral of the experience of the Cain/Kirner government. And then there are those who inhabit higher terrain, who offer us Accord Mark 42 as salvation while wilfully inducing recession and extending the dole-for-trying-to-get-work queues.

The prospect of a period of Labor opposition thus seems somewhat less depressing than it may have in the past. This is not, of course, to counsel the defeatist culture for which Labor's real vocation is negation. What's more of a worry is what Labor will benefit from some sort of generational fix, à la Messrs Kroger and Costello. Young Labor radicals imaginably are a bigger part of this problem than has ever been recognised, not least of all given the historic trend in Australia as elsewhere, to the juridicalisation of politics across the 20th century. The image of the ship of death here threatens to be replaced by the picture of aspirant hordes scrambling onto Laurie Connell's sinking yacht (blue caps).

If we return to thinking not only about previous periods of Labor hegemony, but also to the earlier century, themes of
treachery and hijack may perhaps become less constricting. A century ago, while Morris was still active, attempting in his own commodified way to beautify life as well as to radicalise politics, the ALP was of course in the making. But there were also other forms of radical organisation, such as the Victorian Socialist Party and the Social Questions Committee, where people chose to seek influence over local culture. Feminists and socialists were already setting precedents for working outside independently of the parties, attempting to form a new civic culture. Politics was not yet viewed as the property of parties in the debilitating way in which it now is. The mass party, exemplified by the German Social Democratic Party, had barely yet come to dominance, and it in any case had a vital internal and local life as well as a bureaucratic mass structure.

Politics, in any case, was not completely identified with the winning of state power (and here, again, bolshevism has to take its share of the blame for the transition from 'workers' power' to the seizure of 'state power'). In our own case, alongside this warmer stream, there was also a cooler current in which politics in its Australian inflexion concerned roads and bridges, bread and circuses, where localism never really took off in the way in which it did in German socialist or British radical and Fabian life.

Fabianism itself, a century ago, was in fact a profoundly local and municipal movement. Contrary to widespread radical commonsense, it only became statist later, during the interwar years, when everyone was falling over themselves about planning. By the 30s, in a sense, the ideology of politics had already become dominated by the idea of the state, a process which our local forebears proudly pioneered. Statism was, in some ways, made in Australia, and exported without much value added.

But none of this is to reject the state, to buy into that axiom of the illustrious Lennon (non-Bolshevik) that 'everything the state touches turns to shit'. In this, libertarian, tradition, the state is fetishised, turned into a thing which it is not. For there is always the local state, and beyond it, the panoply of various, muddling institutions which we need in order to organise health and education and the rest. The point may rather be that just as politics has become excessively juridicalised, so has it become too much enmeshed with notions of state power. The outcome ought not be to deinstitutionalise politics so much as to rethink and reclaim it from the state.

William Morris and Ernest Belford Bax were were still remarkably Victorian thinkers. The book which they opened with the ship-of-death nevertheless had a happy ending, though like Blue Velvet the reader is left uncomfortably uncertain as to which story really wins out. Like Kautsky, like Marx, like the Webbs and Ramsay MacDonald they nevertheless themselves believed history's tide still to be running in their direction. Again, of course, there were countervailing moments. Thus Morris wrote in plaintive inspiration in A Dream of John Ball that history was a process where people fought and lost the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and others then have to fight for what they meant under another name...

What follows socialism is as yet unknown to us. But socialism, or something like it, will remain one voice in modernity, the alter ego of capitalism, on which we must draw. Amid all the morbid symptoms, signs of political life will still need to be found. The end of the Labor Decade must also be—in a post-triumphal sense—a new beginning.

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Most of us consider home video to be an escape from politics and the workaday world. Yet even that most escapist of movie genres or styles, science fiction, is very much connected to problems of work and power. Indeed, escapist movies ‘work’ precisely by providing imaginary solutions to very real problems.

Science fiction movies come in a number of types, but the ones which are most interesting and popular are the ones I would call ‘tech noir’—black technology stories. While movies of this genre borrow from a number of other stock movie genres including the mystery, gothic horror and cop dramas, their common trait is that they all deal with the problem of ‘technofear’.

Technofear is a common malaise these days. While earlier science fiction used to assume that technology was good for you as long as it was kept out of bad hands, contemporary science fiction has to deal with a deep-seated paranoia about technology which is undoubtedly occurring and is linked to environmental concerns. It goes further and asks a more challenging question: is it possible to distinguish the human from the inhuman? If technology is something to be feared, is there a sense of the ‘human’ any more which is not fatally compromised by technology?

Tech Noir movies frame the problem of technofear by means of stories about ‘undecideable’ cases—things which are not quite human and not quite technological. The definition of both then hinges on a story which ‘decides’ one way or another, often using a kind of ‘android’ figure.

In the movie Robocop, the central character is a cop who is injured in a shoot-out with the bad guys. They will later turn out to be in the pay of the corporation who made him and they run the police force as a privatised service to the city government. Robocop is essentially a man with robotic prostheses. He wins out over the bad guys by upholding the law, but he also triumphs over a rival law enforcement ‘product’—a robot called Ed II which lacks any human judgment. While Robocop is mostly machine, he is acceptable in the end as an ‘undecideable’ being, somewhere between culture and technology because his human judgment still has control over his technical powers.

An opposite case is The Terminator, in which the bad, destructive machine is clothed in living human flesh. The humans who battle with the terminator are not only fighting for their lives, but fighting against the nightmare vision of the future in which technology has completely subjugated culture. The undecideable in this case has to be exterminated before it exterminates all that is human.

More complex is the classic Tech Noir film Bladerunner, in which the undecideables are the product of a biotechnology which can make replicas of humans called, appropriately enough, replicants. In the film, these have reached a stage where their maker, the Tyrell corporation, can endow them with memory, thus giving them the illusion that they are indeed human. Replicants are used as slave labour in the ‘off world colonies’. When they escape and return to earth they are hunted down and killed by ‘bladerunners’ like Deckard, the central character. What makes this story interesting in the Tech Noir genre is, firstly, the fact that Deckard falls in love with a replicant and disappears over the border with her, cementing a bond between the human and what might best be called ‘posthuman’ life. More disturbing still, there are suggestions in the film, expressed in the final cut, that Deckard himself does not know if he is human or replicant—or at least whether by becoming a hunter-killer of these posthuman forms of life he is a barbaric and inhuman thing.

Bladerunner is, to date, the most challenging film in the Tech Noir genre because it raises the possibility that the difference between the human and the inhuman, between culture and technology is too far gone to be unscrambled. There can be no naive appeals to ‘human nature’ or a return to nature when the human is a product of the technical as much, if not more, than vice versa.

The question arises as to how this domination of the cultural by the technical came about. Tech Noir films at their best suggest an appropriate answer to this—the bad corporation. The makers of Robocop and the replicant are two such bad corporations, suggesting a world where corporate power has run amok, subsuming cultural values under the remorseless quest for surplus value, as it were. The film Aliens goes one better, suggesting that the megacorporation is responsible for an environmental recklessness which unleashes the alien on unsuspecting people—a nightmare vision of ‘bad nature’ let loose by capital.

Tech Noir films have also branched out from mechanical to information technologies. In The Running Man, computer graphic simulation is used to falsify the news, and a universal media vector pumping out trash TV keeps the restive population comatose as in Robocop. The theme of artificial memory resurfaces in Total Recall, borrowed from the novelist Philip K Dick. This film also uses the bad corporation motif, only this time in the form of a state-monopoly capitalism based on the mining industry and set on Mars.
More interesting is the idea that information technology offers to those in power the possibility of controlling the past as well as the future—an Orwellian nightmare given new currency by being connected to new technology. In *Total Recall* undecideability is experienced as a schizophrenic state in which the average human-in-the-street can no longer distinguish synthetic reality from anything else or, indeed, one synthetic reality from another.

Perhaps the most chilling aspect of Tech Noir is its suggestion that the boundaries of the human body are not sacrosanct, that technology infiltrates the individual body as much as the social body. In the great low-budget Tech Noir film *Hardware*, a voyeur watches what takes place in the apartment opposite by means of infra red vision. He witnesses not only a violent ‘crime’ in progress, in a clear homage to Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, but also a sex scene between the lead characters. This film offers the image of the voyeuristic act of watching sex at the movies taken to its logical conclusion—watching the internal body-states of the participants. This is a difficult scene to watch because it makes the spectator complicit with technology’s violation of the body.

In the Canadian Tech Noir film *Videodrome* the possible symbiosis of the body and information technology is taken as oozily close to the limit as is possible. *Videodrome* gets off to a good start, positing the suppersession of the real as we know it in video simulation, but then rapidly falls apart both in terms of narrative and plausibility. If *Bladerunner* is the limit to what Tech Noir can do and say within the limits of popular film, then *Videodrome* lies just outside that limit. *Videodrome* does more than suggest that television technology has destabilised the social picture of reality and the individual's sense of her or his body in the world, it enacts it. This makes it a scary and unrelenting ride, a little too troubling and a little too implausible to succeed as mere entertainment. *Videodrome*’s ‘hero’, Max, ends up pledging himself to combat the evil effects of videodrome by passing into its simulated reality. If simulation has swallowed up the old world, then the only point of resistance would be within.

Contrary to usual Hollywood practice, three Tech Noir films even offer images of collective resistance to the bad corporation and its undecideable machines. In *The Terminator*, *Running Man* and *Total Recall* these are armed, underground resistance movements. Interestingly, they all show the resistance using technology against itself. They offer images of technology reappropriated by collective human agency. These films were made by left-liberal directors and producers but star Arnold Schwarzenegger, the personal friend of Reagan and Bush. The politics of these movies seem mostly to be that of the Hollywood liberal left rather than their reactionary star but, in any case, they signal the fact that technofear is a condition which affects both the left and the right. Both have tended to stake their image of the future on positive technological ideals, and the crisis of both left and right stems in part from a common malaise—technofear.

Tech Noir films are perhaps more interesting from the point of view of gender politics. Frequently, it is women who play active roles in the overcoming of the undecideable ‘thing’. In part, this stems from the archaic image of the woman as close to ‘nature’ than man. This image is
actively mobilised in *Alien* and *Aliens*, where the female heroine has to improvise solutions to the attack of bad nature when men and machines have failed. Here good nature (the maternal human) does battle with bad nature (the alien) which the bad corporation and its technology has unleashed. The gender politics of all these films are ambiguous to say the least, but not without interest or potential. Technofear questions the promethean values of technology, which is often regarded, both by its supporters and detractors, as masculine. Hence it is not surprising that the feminine is put forward in Tech Noir as an important agent in overcoming bad technology—to the extent that in *Hardware* the heroine, armed with a baseball bat, does battle with the bad machine while the would-be hero is too zapped out on acid to know his arse from his elbow!

Why are Tech Noir movies so popular? In part, I think, because they offer imaginary solutions to technofear. The question than is: what are the origins of technofear? I mentioned that movies are an escape from the workaday world, yet they work as an escape from it because they offer solutions to the unresolved problems that the work we do does not satisfy real human needs, does not really give us more control over our lives, and only adds a tiny sliver to the great junk pile of bureaucratic disorder which seems to hold the world in its thrall.

By working, we seem to create a vast store of ‘dead labour’ in the form of bricks and freeways and endless rows of filing cabinets full of unread and unreadable records. We create a vast power over ourselves. Rather than technology and its products helping us to live, it seems we live to service technology and its products. The contemporary world appears as a vast, inhuman, ‘undecideable’ power over and against us.

It is this aspect of social reality, this vast ‘alien’ world our forebears made, which now makes and remakes us in its image, this is the reality at the root of technofear. In technofear, the technological products of our great modern ancestors’ labour plays like a horror movie in the minds of the living. Tech Noir movies help us to imagine the dimensions of this problem. They help us to define the issues and reassure us that we are right to be worried. They project solutions into the future to show that solutions are possible. They may not have the answers, they may not even ask all the right questions—that would be too much to expect even of Hollywood’s most liberal liberals. Yet they have made a popular genre which allows us to imagine what this undecideable realm of human freedom is that we have to win.

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**Beads and Trinkets**

Documentary filmmaking and the Left have a long history. Alastair Walton looks at their relationship.

“It’s like when you go into a psychiatrist’s office and you don’t really tell them what you did. You lie, but even the lie you’ve chosen to tell is revealing. I wanted people to see that my life isn’t so easy, and one step further than that is, the movie’s not completely me...Because you will never know the real me. Ever.”

Madonna commenting on her tour documentary, *Truth or Dare: On the Road, behind the Scenes, and in Bed with Madonna*, in Vanity Fair, April 1991.

“...the Imperium’s material well-being has come to rest on its technological ability to generate and then merchandise attractively opaque forms and commodities: beads and trinkets to bemeuse the natives. Everything changes. And it does not change at all.”


The recent argy bargy over the ‘correctness’ of Tom Zubrycki’s documentary on the union movement, *Amongst Equals*, is a grand example of the struggles around the representation of ‘truth’ and ‘history’ in documentary films. *Amongst Equals* also throws up the questions, ‘what are documentaries for?’ And ‘how is the form used to tell a story?’ But rather than go over old ground with a discussion of *Amongst Equals*, I pondered these questions while viewing a bunch of docsos at the recent Sydney Film Festival.

Watching the two weeks of continual screenings, I was principally interested in what forms the documentaries would take to express themselves. A phenomenon distinct-
tive in many of the documentaries presented was that they had one person driving the focus, line, script, and editing. There seemed to be no collective or group efforts. Sure, a team of people were responsible along the process line, but the films were dominated by the view of one. For instance, Island of Lies (Australia, 1991), by Gillian Coote, is directed, produced and scripted by her while Dennis O’Rourke was the director, producer, screenplay writer, photographer and sound recordist for The Good Woman of Bangkok and The Architecture of Doom (Sweden, 1990) was directed, produced, edited and scripted by Peter Cohen, and both Juvenile Liaison 2 (UK, 1990) and The Leader, The Driver and the Driver’s Wife (UK, 1990) were directed, scripted and sound recorded by Nick Broomfield.

This multirole production reflects not only the small budget position of such projects, but the personal intensity burnt into the whole product. However, with more participants and with equal zest, a set of films (documentary and realist cinema) at last year’s festival were produced by a collective in northern England, Amber Films. Each member of the group swapped roles on each project and everyone was paid equal rates, no matter what position they filled.

I am not sure whether by design or default, but a large number of this year’s collection of documentaries had race as their binding theme, be it about New York’s gay blacks (Paris is Burning), Nazis (Blood in the Face), immigrant workers (H-2 Worker & Good News) or black history (The Kimberley Mob and Island of Lies). Island of Lies was resourced by the Documentary Fellowship scheme. The filmmaker “follows the route of early settlers heading north out of Sydney to Fraser Island to uncover the lies and secrets of Australia’s settlement”.

The film attempts to move away from the traditions of direct filming (the fly on the wall approach) and cast the maker in the film. Yet, for me, Island of Lies sometimes does not meet its purpose. Gillian Coote attempts to tell the story of a landscape charged with the pain of conflict and struggles and we hear the stories from some elders, white and black. However, the questions and stories of intimidation and silence about Aboriginal history, by blacks and whites, were not always followed up. The film was given many cues to investigate these avenues and thereby round out the story, but mostly did not.

The Left and the documentary mode of film making are entwined through their history and in a world of concentrated media ownership, it is an important avenue of alternative storytelling. However, the advent of television has had the effect of creating a need for more documentaries to program while, at the same time, diminishing their power of impact. Television also dictates the form and subject by emphasising spectacle, the bizarre and the presence of a cultural hero. The ability of one-off docs to inform and attract attention is an unequal fight against the opaque beads and trinkets of A Current Affair, 60 Minutes, and the State of Origin.

The origin of the force in documentaries arises from their perceived power of Revelation, Truth, and Reality. However, these banners have been sites for inquiry and conflict within the making and viewing of documentaries ever since the coinage of the term ‘documentary’. John Grierson, in a review of a 1926 film in the New York Sun, first coined the term: “Of course, Moana, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value.” He was a Scot who defined the documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” and made his first doco, Drifters, in 1929 before going on to influence documentary film form and set up its institutionalisation through national film boards in the UK, Canada and Australia.

Robert J Flaherty, the director of Moana, offered a mainly visual description of unfamiliar human activities and artifacts—of exotica. In many ways, the film Paris is Burning, is a film of the urban exotic, as opposed to the other of the tundra of southern seas. The spectacle of gay, black men and boys ‘voguing’ at drag balls in Harlem is pure pop exotica, all the way from the popular anthropological films of the 1920s. But there is another similarity. Flaherty had little interest in analysis or explanation as his films were virtually all silent “using sound when it became available…essentially as an accompaniment to the images”.

How can one dare to talk when the many interviewees on the screen are reaching states of complete ecstasy just listening to themselves articulate their unattainable dreams of fame and fortune? They aspire to the ultimate material fantasy—to be white, married and living in opulent comfort.

Mind, this is coming from the mouths of blacks, mostly unemployed, ostracised by their homophobic communities, and rotting in ghettos built and maintained by the very class they aspire to. The paradoxes, the real and the artificial, confront us in every word spoken.

The filmmaker has told the story with interviews, simple camerawork, no voiceover and no analysis or explanations. The saturated pictures of those who created Voguing and the House of Xtravaganza are hugely entertaining. But the form of this and many of the documentaries at the festival was uninspiring. This is not to discredit the hard work of raising funds and getting the access and trust of subjects, but is it enough?

Documentary makers have a zeal for filming losers and the marginalised. Projects are undertaken to highlight wrongs, but the film and video documentary has real problems in actually empowering the subjects it films. The function of the documentary, patently, is to document problems. Answers are merely suggested, and when they are, they are hidden behind the spectacle of the exotic. Perhaps the real challenge of documentary filmmaking is to take the form further and to tackle hard subjects, not simply to foster a form of Left tabloid journalism.

ALASTAIR WALTON is a Sydney freelance journalist.
Almost every TV soap has its resident cop.

David Nichols looks at why.

When Nick Parrish first moved into Marilyn’s boarding house in Home and Away, she soon discovered problems with her tenant. Actually, the problem was nothing to do with Nick himself (he’s a charming, if slightly cocky young man who became a police officer to spite his upper middle-class lawyer parents) but with other would-be boarders.

You see, no one wanted to live with a cop. They figured he’d be nosing in on their affairs all the time, and he drove one prospective cohabitant away immediately by suggesting she change her tyres. Marilyn asked him to move out, and felt very guilty about it; later, when she saw Nick rescue Michael from drowning, she changed her mind and took him back because “no one has a nice word to say about the police until they need them”.

Though he’s occasionally heroic, it would be hard to imagine Nick taking his job as seriously as Paul Berry, the E Street policeman who—after living through the violent deaths of first his wife Rhonda and then his fiancee Kimberley—became a sweaty, gun-toting vigilante, bursting into a TV studio, shooting himself in a moment of lucidity and ultimately being institutionalised.

Cops come in all shapes, sizes and ages on TV soaps, but (like doctors) there’s at least one on almost all of them. Neighbours is the notable exception, but then Neighbours has never been big on non-domestic authority figures. Like doctors, police are, of course, the handiest of dramatic tools, useful as a vehicle for bringing in outside storylines and easily involved with all the disparate regular characters. Both also allow us at home to delve (or be delved) into our twin fixations, health (therefore death) and crime (thus security and, of course, titillation when we see someone else get what’s coming to them).

The real difference, though, is that we all know doctors and most of us trust them. How many people know a police officer, and who feels confident or carefree when the police turn up on their doorstep uninvited (for instance)? It’s strange, then, to see the police on TV in such a prominent community role, enjoying so much interaction with everyday soap folk.

Police drama was the beginning of Australian TV drama—from Homicide through Cop Shop and, in a natural evolution, Prisoner. Of course, the police on TV are still about as realistic as any other ‘type’ on TV; that is, not in the least. But something as serious as the contemporary public perception of the force has led to some interesting exchanges.

Take the time on Neighbours when young school-leaver Ryan told his aunt Dorothy that he wasn’t interested in going to university; he wanted to become a police officer, and eventually a criminologist. One of Dot’s objections was the “bad image” the police had today. As it happened, Ryan rejected the whole police idea when he was badly treated in a suspected break-and-enter case; though the whole thing was a misunderstanding, he couldn’t forgive. He joined the army instead.

On the very day I began writing this story, Home and Away gave me a perfect illustration of the ‘bad image problem’. Sally Fletcher was doing a school project on a valuable member of the community; she chose Constable Nick. Nick came to pick her up for a spin in the cop car and found her adoptive mother, Pippa, in the kitchen.

Pippa: Now, Nick, I have to warn you, Sal has read everything she can on the police force.

Nick: Done a bit of research, has she?

Pippa: Oh yes, takes her work very seriously.

Nick: Well, good for her.

(Enter Sally)

Nick: G’day Sal.

Sally: Hello Nick.

Nick: Are you gonna record this?

Sally: Yeah, then I won’t forget anything, is that OK?

Nick: As long as I remember not to say anything too incriminating!

Sally (speaking into recorder): This is Sally Fletcher speaking to Constable Nick Parrish. I read an article in a newspaper that said that the image of the police force has dramatically improved. How did they do that?

(Nick and Pippa look at one another.)

Pippa: Don’t say I didn’t warn you!

The scene ends here, which means that we never find out how the image of the police force was improved dramatically (only that it happened). But whatever small items TV news might dredge up to discredit the force, TV drama role models are almost always nothing but perfect.

A Country Practice’s resident cop is Frank Gilroy—as played by Brian Wenzel, who’s held down the role for the whole of ACP’s 10-year run. “Policemen are pivotal,” he says. “A lot happens round a policeman. If I’d been playing some other part I might well have gone from the show by now. He’s sustainable, it’s easy to write stuff for the policeman.”

ACP’s police stories, like their medical stories, are put in the hands of a researcher who liaises with the police. “Any police stories are sent off to the police community relations department,” says Wenzel. “They vet the scripts and check the script is accord-
The police make sure I’m always up to date with the uniform, too. The show goes out to about 30 countries now so, as far as the police here are concerned, I’m projecting an image for them. I get on well with them, too. There are a lot of clichéd things on TV. Writers will have a policeman pushing a prisoner into a cell. They don’t really do that, and I’d never push a prisoner into a cell. I’d criticise people who do this, but maybe they’ve just seen to many movies. In one episode of A Country Practice I shot a man, a bad man. A police doctor said to me later that everything I did was an accurate portrayal of a policeman under those circumstances: the stress, and the guilt.”

But Frank Gilroy is one of the old guard of TV police; the new breed of TV soap cop is utterly disarming. Last year saw Josephine Mitchell in a guest role in Home and Away as a young policewoman who quit the force after an (unseen) associate was shot in the line of duty.

Bruce Samazan’s Max in E Street is a virginal Christian in his early twenties with a black-and-white outlook on the world and the law. Sincere and pious, Max occasionally breaks out of light comedy (when he mixes with the teenage characters in the show) to get involved in police action—which, in E Street, usually means someone is going to get killed. But Max is a classic character. The problem of how to make a police officer interesting is solved here by making him so good it’s ridiculous. Samazan himself believes that Max is only realistic in his “young rookie” persona. “I’ve met quite a few rookie cops like Max,” he says. “They recognise me from the show and come up to talk to me—and they’re exactly the same! He’s true to life in that respect.”

Max has a boss, too: the ‘old guard’ Sergeant O’Sullivan, as played by Les Dayman. Like ACP’s Gilroy, O’Sullivan has an unconventional woman in his life—in this case Nurse Martha (who, in an interesting twist, refuses to marry him, though they live together). He’s also similarly stuffy and conservative.

These are the cops Australians like to see on their TV screens. They’re stoic but human; they work long, hours serving people who often don’t thank them for it. The police force no doubt feels that this is a good image for them; the public definitely enjoy seeing this angle on the police in their homes every night. And if Terence or Harry in ACP don’t always save the patient they’re operating on, at least we know that the forces of law and order will always be upheld—on every soap, every night.

DAVID NICHOLS writes for teen magazines.

Promises Unfulfilled


The Gifthorse is subtitled A Critical Look at Equal Employment in Australia and the authors make no apology for their close examination of the toothless nature of the horse’s mouth. The book examines Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation and practice in Australia, and places the legislation and the resulting programs into a social and economic context. This is particularly relevant to the changed context of recession-bound Australia in 1991.

Gretchen Poiner and Sue Wills have taken considerable trouble to explain the basis of concepts of equality and inequality, discrimination, affirmative action, and to demystify and re-explain EEO language. This is valuable in itself as a prevalent form of resistance to equal opportunity is professional ignorance and instant forgetting. The restatement of the rationale behind EEO programs is a refresher for those constantly involved in the mire of implementation.

Many of the shortcomings of Australian EEO legislation result from the problems of translating the American experience. The major problems both in the USA and Australia have been caused by the imposition of a legislative demand for equality which has not been matched by a change in the way society views or organises gender relations. As a result, reasonable demands for equality for women and other groups have often been circumvented by wily employers experienced at statistical manipulation.

The American approach has been intrinsically involved with the law. Discrimination cases have often been long and costly. The involvement of the US Supreme Court in making judgments which are essentially social legislation stems from a quite different tradition to that of Australia. An example of this is the Roe versus Wade case establishing abortion rights for women. Now that the US Supreme Court is moving into an increasingly conservative mode, any influences in the future will probably work against disadvantaged groups. Recently, the trend in the USA to move away from timetables and numerical goals and to put energy into comparable worth cases—in other words, a move from trying to put women into men’s jobs to attempting to revalue women’s work.

The adoption of many American approaches to EEO grew out of the need to do something to acknowledge the women’s liberation movement. ‘Unable to legislate for liberation, mildly
reformist governments tried legislating for equality", argue Poiner and Wills. Thus EEO legislation is about trying to treat women and other disadvantaged groups as white Anglo-Saxon men, as long as they behave appropriately.

My main criticism of The Gifthorse, as with most books on EEO in Australia, is that there is a lot more evidence on what happens in the public sector than in the private sector, and the evidence is predominantly about the experience of women rather than other groups within the purview of EEO, such as Koories and the disabled. This is understandable, in that the major reforms in EEO have occurred in the public sector over a longer period of time. The bureaucracies' skills in manipulating strategies and changing the rules have been developed to a fine art form. The collection of data and the writing of annual reports by those involved in EEO may well have done something to smarten up personnel procedures and records in government departments, but it has not resulted in changing the lot of the majority of women, Koories and people with disabilities.

The chapters of The Gifthorse which come closest to the core of the frustrations of the last decade are "Bastards" and "Beneficiaries". The techniques of resistance are clearly and accurately outlined, and well known to any EEO practitioner—misrepresentation, obstruction, sustained disbelief and circumvention among them. The games the powerful play are so complex and devious that new players are easily confused and beaten. The sardonic list of "The fifty ways of avoiding change—a checklist for saving time and ingenuity" is terrific, and the sections on queen bees and homosocial ability (known in Victoria as cloning) are accurate without overt bitterness.

The chapter on "Beneficiaries" has an equally strong message. The real beneficiaries of EEO are generally middle class women or those from ethnic backgrounds. Even among these groups, however, the beneficiaries are comparatively small in number and must turn into mock men to be accepted. The disadvantaged groups as a mass are not greatly changed by the EEO legisla-

tion. One of the reasons for this is that the underpinning of society is woman as breeder and carer: "For beneficiaries to enjoy equal opportunity in employment certain other benefits must be made available...for women these include relief from child rearing responsibilities: for Aboriginal people the issues include health and housing."

EEO legislation by itself cannot claim to have changed patterns of employment. It is an important lesson that other government initiatives—freedom of information, occupational health and safety, and societal trends—are contributors to the success or non-success of the legislation.

Sadly, the promotion of equal employment as an issue has led to exploitation by bandwaggoners running courses in personal power and women's management without bewailing even the palliative techniques of transcendental meditation.

The Gifthorse points out that EEO has had a mixed reception. The House of Representatives standing committee on legal and constitutional affairs has had a range of responses which indicate that EEO is a good idea but not working well. One of the messages from experience so far is to diversify the tactics and place less reliance on legislation.

Clare Burton's The Promise and the Price has concentrated far more on the inequalities of the labour market and not just the inadequacies of the EEO legislation. Burton provides a close examination of the major equity issues in organisational practice and how current practices affect women's employment.

For me, the most valuable and interesting section of Burton's book is that which deals with gender and power in organisations. Since most work organisation was set up by men, it tends to reflect men's values. This helps to account for women's inequality in the workplace. Burton explores the proposition that men feel that women contaminate the workplace; that men do not want to do work that women may become identified with; and that men will leave jobs in which women build up numbers. "Without the masculine connotation the job ceases to be attractive to many men. Job satisfac-

tion is tied up with masculine ego satisfaction." This phenomenon is also discussed by Poiner and Wills in relation to American experiences of EEO programs. It was found that the nature of work patterns changed to meet the challenge of women's entry, i.e. if the number of women employed in an occupation category rose, the salary earnings dropped.

Not only do women make men feel uneasy in organisations, but women often want no part of an environment "where decision-making seems more to do with point-scoring than reasonable policy-making". Organisational and occupational structures need to change if there are to be real opportunities for women.

Burton's greatest value to the practitioner is her careful analysis of the nature of job design and evaluation. The chapters dealing with these areas contain invaluable checklists for ensuring that relevant skills and qualities can be included and their relative worth assessed. In this time of new skills training, award restructuring and calls for new workplace organisation, now must surely be the time to take advantage of the breaks in the normal managerial pattern to inject new and more equitable work designs and structures.

One of the conclusions feminists will draw from The Gifthorse and The Promise and the Price is that EEO legislation and programs have had an impact, but not a mass impact. There needs to be a strategic regrouping to pick a tactic or two which would help the majority of women gain more status, money and dignity in the workplace. This may well be a social interventionist program like work-based child care. Alternatively, the themes of Burton's essays seem to point to changing job design, so as to change the people in the job, which would in turn change the organisation. Whatever the solutions or strategies, the next decade needs an injection of new hope and direction. The Gifthorse and The Promise and the Price provide an excellent starting point.

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CORRECT LINE COOKING

Sweet Smell of Excess

I write this month in praise of smelling: smelling as a verb and as an attribute. Smell as a sense opens us up to the world's vagaries in a particularly vulnerable way. Commentaries waft up our nose quite against our will. We can't close our noses in the way we shut our eyes against that which we do not wish to see, at least not without the use of our hands. Turning our noses up does not help either. We are constantly touched by the gentle or rough hand of smell; penetrated by the pheromones of fate.

Indeed, smell takes us back to babyhood and the pre-guilt era when we thought bodies were totally about pleasure. The alleys of our minds may hide rotting garbage, but they also perhaps contain the whiff of those who cared for us before we learned not to stick our noses in where they didn't belong. The smells of mother, in most cases. Which probably explains why we desperately deny these pleasures.

Smell is perhaps the most underrated sense. We more often hear of it as a negative. Something smelly is generally thought of as something strange at best and suspicious or downright off at worst. The nostrils of the dominant paradigm sense peculiarity in most things said to smell—such as fish, animals and women. At the same time, good smelling things are more or less totally the province of femininity. Think of perfume, flowers and food. Indeed, the Great Nose of History sometimes puts women (or should that be Woman?) in this category, as in Spenser's 'her sweet odour did them all excelle'. The notion that the smells of the body, and of the female body in particular, are somehow to be suppressed has resulted in such wonders as the deodorised sanitary napkin which I assume still adorns the underconfident panties of teenagers throughout this wide brown land. But some of you are probably frowning at the eruption, or should that be seeping, of such unpopular subjects into the pristine pages of this journal. There be an end to redness, as the actress said to the commissar.

Two further instances of the lack of attention given to smell by our sight-biased minds. Firstly, we have very few words to describe this sense. We say that something smells like something, not that a food has a bright smell, or a soft smell. What would the olfactory equivalent of tangy be? (Perhaps tangy?) There is no common word for a lack of a sense of smell as there is for the lack of sight or hearing. We would probably say smell-blind. Secondly, noses are generally not praised, but are often the cause of mirth. Only as a phallic indicator of size in the male of our species is a big nose an item of any worth.

Smell runs into taste like the back of our noses into our throats. To cook for smell and taste is the opposite of the type of 'entertaining' which I hereby dub 'cooking for the boss' whereby appearance (and expense) are all. Smell is very non-bourgeois. It is a cunt of a sense and will linger around your house for hours, tangling with your tongue long after the meal itself has disappeared, denying that there must be a definite end to pleasure.

Curry is, at its best, replete with delicate smells which prefigure and follow the actual main game. I do not have space here to examine the ways in which foods from outside the Anglo tradition are often called smelly as a criticism, though I still hear this stupidity born of willed ignorance from time to time. Be a devil and eat this recipe with your fingers. It will mark you as a smell and taste lover to the visual world. A succubus. A skunk. One who breathes it all in with his or her eyes shut. Enjoy.

Nepalese Pea and Potato Curry
(From The Curry Cookbook by Charmaine and Reuben Solomon—which is worth nosing through.)

Serves 4
3 tablespoons ghee and oil mixture
1 large onion, finely sliced
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
3 green chillis, chopped
2 teaspoons finely-chopped garlic
1 teaspoon finely-chopped fresh ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
500g potatoes, peeled and cubed
2 cups fresh green peas
2 large tomatoes, chopped
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon toasted ground cummin
1 cup hot water

Garnish: 2 tablespoons fresh coriander leaves, chopped

Heat ghee and oil mixture in a saucepan and fry onion till soft and golden. Stir in pepper, chillis, garlic, ginger, turmeric and salt. Continue cooking for 2 or 3 minutes, then add potatoes and stir till light brown all over. Add remaining ingredients and hot water, stir well, cover and simmer till vegetables are tender and the oil shows on the surface. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve with chapatis or rice, and accompaniments. Good accompaniments might be a raita—such as bananas mixed with yoghurt, and which would contrast with the curry—or a chutney.

Penelope Cottier.
Half-baked Stalinism

The debate between Peter Robson and Peter Baldwin (ALR 128, May) was most interesting, but it concerns me that the two Peters along with the rest of the Left have not given deregulation a reasoned assessment. With some elements of the Left there is still a sort of half-baked stalinism; a desire to boss everybody around.

Do we want to follow the doctrinal absurdity of supporting or opposing economic regulation as such? Each regulation should be examined to see who gains and who loses, and on that basis supported or opposed.

It is becoming clearer that many of the excesses of the 1980s involved state government intervention in the economy—especially in WA, but also in Victoria and Queensland. Many of the destructive activities of Bond, Skase and Connell were, in fact, based on state government intervention as much as federal deregulation.

In any case, how far did we deregulate? Certainly, no government, state or federal, took microeconomic deregulation seriously. It would be useful if, as Peter Robson suggests, the federal government did set up a wool scouring operation. They would discover how many state and federal regulations and how much legislation affects new industries. They would also discover that many of the regulations contradict each other or are simply unnecessary.

More basic than any other microeconomic factor, however, is the taxation system. In many ways the tax system is the strongest guiding hand the government has on the economy. Nobody seems to want to think this through.

1. Exempting all homes regardless of value from capital gains tax, land tax, and tax on imputed income, led to a massive tax induced boom in fancy domestic real estate. Why build a business, employ people, and pay all the taxes involved when the government is clearly signalling via the tax system that it wants you to speculate in domestic real estate?

2. Keating introduced a mild capital gains tax on investment real estate and other assets, but the reintroduction of negative gearing tended to outweigh that in investors' eyes. Hence the boom in real estate in general.

3. There are companies operating at a loss which are still paying substantial amounts of payroll tax. This tax is, in effect, a message from the government to employers to employ fewer people.

4. Depreciation allowances on plant and equipment in Australia are extremely niggardly compared to overseas rival economies. So much of Australian industry operates with ancient equipment.

5. The one tax in Australia which falls unambiguously on wealth is land tax. It is also the only tax any government is seriously considering cutting. We should be demanding that it be increased.

In the 1980s the government removed some regulations but maintained the tax laws which sent the economy down some pretty unproductive paths. If we do not recognise this we will simply do it again, in one form or another.

Rodney Henderson, Annandale, NSW.

Half-baked Zionism?

Sol Encel's potted history of the Kurds (ALR 128) leaves readers mystified about what he calls the failure of progressive people "to pay attention to the Kurds". He neglects to mention the fact that the radical Iraqi regime of Abdul Karim Qasim, which overthrew the British puppet government in 1958, was opposed and undermined by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader at the time—largely because Barzani was himself a feudal landlord and Qasim had embarked on a program of land redistribution (very necessary from any 'progressive' perception of Iraq's problems).

Qasim was far too close to the Iraqi Communist Party for the comfort of the CIA and the Zionists and naturally he had to be destabilised—the Kurds and Barzani were most useful in this exercise, only to be dumped unceremoniously in 1975. The CIA supported the Ba’ath Party because its ideology was violently anti-communist, and when Qasim was overthrown in 1963 a massacre of Iraqi CP members was carried out by the Ba’ath aided by CIA/Mossad intelligence in the form of names and addresses.

Barzani was, of course, delighted. His lengthy leadership of the Kurdish struggle continued in tandem with CIA/Mossad aid. Qasim himself had attempted to forge a better deal for the Kurds but was faced with unremitting hostility from the feudalist Barzani. This in itself indicates why the Kurds suffered a number of political splits, with leftwing Kurdish groups emerging to oppose Barzani. This also explains the 'failure' of progressive Arabs and anti-Ba’athists to embrace 'the Kurds' in the past.

This information is freely available. I am therefore appalled that ALR would publish such a selective history of the Kurdish role in Iraqi politics which basically amounts to disinformation and mystification. The Left should instead be receiving analyses which might help in decisions as to which Kurdish political tendency deserves support from 'progressive' people.

If you have well-known Australian Israeli lobbyists like Encel writing for ALR you might at least seek alternative information from non-Zionists to balance your 'histories'. Encel succeeds in making progressive Arabs and others look negligent in their "inexplicable" failure to support the Kurds—by writing Qasim out of his history. This is not fair!

Caroline Graham, University of Technology, Sydney.
DEAR DR HARTMAN

The Fat Vac

Hello patients,
We live in exciting times for women. Times of change in unexpected quarters. At Melbourne airport recently I noticed new signs outside the Mothers' Room.

Instead of the usual international symbol for mother and child (stick figure in skirt with baby in swaddling clothes) there are now two adult figures. One is in a skirt and one is in pants. (Of course, whether this change in symbols actually influences who goes into the room to change the nappies is quite another matter.)

This airport observation illustrates the fascinating minutiae of social change in the wake of the second wave of feminism. However, when we examine the intimate psychosexual domain of human sexuality, I'm afraid this wave turns out to be a bit of a dumper. And the majority of sexual surfers who've been washed up onto the beach are persons of the female gender.

Quite simply, my clinics are constantly besieged by desperate bands of plump feminists who've been trying 'to love their bodies' since the early 70s. It's been a long, hard struggle. One patient covered her home in paintings by Reubens and then stood in front of the mirror and called herself 'cuddly', 'curvaceous' and 'voluptuous'.

Another patient simply put up a picture of Jenny Craig and threw darts at it for over a decade. Another was jailed for conspiracy to bomb Weight Watchers HQ.

All these strategies have failed. My clinics are now full of ageing activists in size 16 clothes who are screaming 'I'm not voluptuous, I'm fat!' As soon as the object of my desire sees my buttocks, they don't want to touch me!'

The particular portion of the anatomy identified as the passion killer varies from patient to patient, but the basic message is the same.

"Patients," I always say, "identify a market, deliver the service." So I've installed a small operating theatre in each of my clinics called a Body Modification Unit and I've pioneered a new procedure. It's called a Subcutaneous Cellulite Suction Removal System, but I prefer to call it the 'Fat Vac'.

Now, it's come to my attention (via a surreptitious peep at your revealing readership survey form) that quite a few readers of this magazine are not as trim around the hips as they could be. I won't cause humiliation by naming you. You know who you are.

Don't worry. Just pop along to one of my clinics and we'll slit you open from knee to hip and just suck it all out. The beauty of this procedure is that you can eat as much as you like after the operation. You'll never put weight on your hips again, because we've removed that part of your body. It's so simple, it's frightening.

By the way, don't believe any of this nonsense about facelifts that you read in women's magazines. All this business about not being able to smile after the 'op'.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, an over-enthusiastic surgeon who nips and tucks just a little too much behind the ears, can leave a patient smiling for the rest of their life.

But I ask you, in an ugly world, is that a problem? Someone who's always got a smile on their face is a joy to have around.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman's secretary, Julie McCrossin, c/- ALR.
The View from Britain

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